SPIDEY 2 SET VISIT

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GIANT 2004 PREVIEW

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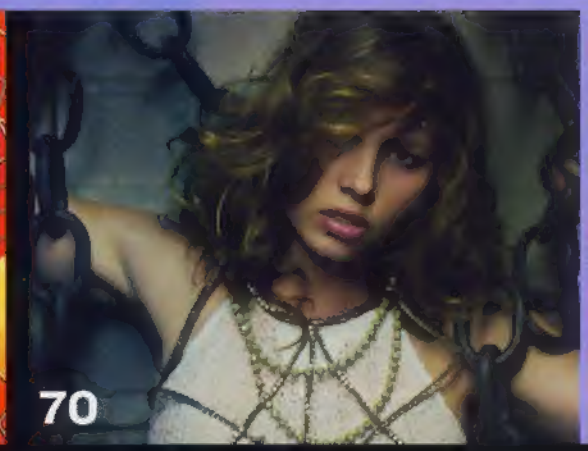

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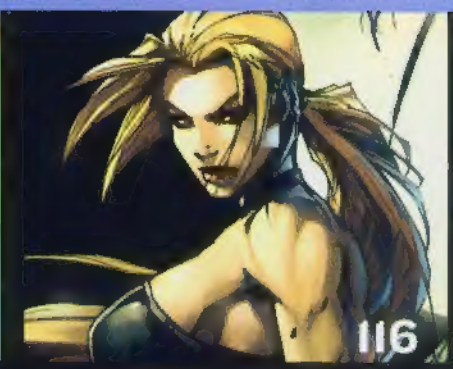
Superman/Supergirl jam cover (left) by Jim Lee and Michael Turner opens the door to our massive **2004 Preview on p. 22** and our **Superman/Batman #8 Sneak Peek on p. 60**. Spider-Man 2 (right) leads into our **Spider-Man 2 Set Visit on p. 56**.



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GET YOUR HANDS ON AN EXCLUSIVE MIGNOLA HELLBOY STORY

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THE BALLS ARE DROPPIN'!

Prepare for Preview Palooza.

2004 looks to be a blockbuster year for comics, and to get you ahead of the curve on all your favorite titles, we tracked down enough info to make your heads explode with our bursting-at-the-seams 2004 Comic Preview, a mammoth, 30-page endeavor that left our staff drooling and wearing straitjackets by the time all was said and done. We preview over 100 of the hottest, most anticipated titles of the upcoming year, and give our forecast for what we think will be the Top 10 Comic Events of the Year. Where will *Origin II* fall? How will Jim Lee's run on *Superman* perform? What's the buzz on Brian Michael Bendis' new take on Marvel's *Secret War*? And what the heck will DC's *Identity Crisis* be about? All the scoops you'll need to know begin on **page 22!**

But that's not all we've got in our preview arsenal! Besides running an 8-page excerpt from *Superman/Batman* #8—Michael Turner's debut drawing the icons of the DCU, hitting stores in February—we're offering up a full-length, 22-page preview of the brand new Marvel Knights Fantastic Four comic titled, ironically enough, *4*.

Get set for another rip-roaring edition of our annual Year-Kicker extravaganza; raise you glasses and help us toast to a brand new year of amazing comic action!

Sincerely,

Gareb S. Shamus

BYTHENUMBERS...

1 Raccoon that slipped inside the office and urinated in a Research office closet

16 Staffers, including Research Assistant Chris Ward **(below)**, it took to wrangle said raccoon into a cardboard box with a hockey stick (just kidding, PETA!)

12 Times Associate Editor Jesse Thompson giggled like a schoolgirl while interviewing "Punisher" star Rebecca Romijn-Stamos

26 Months it took for a new game—*Mario Kart Double Dash* —to dethrone *Halo* as the No. 1 "must play" after-hours game

429 Total shots consumed by Wizard staffers at a recent Novemberfest party after spinning the dangerous "Wheel of Shots"

1 Staffer who used beard trimmers on his naughty bits because "there was nothing good on TV"

2 Mirrors needed to accomplish the trimming

7 Times Wesley Snipes used either the phrase "Peace, brother, peace" or "One love, baby, one love" during an interview with Staff Writer Mike Cotton

47 Unprintable resolutions made by the Wizard staff for the New Year

7 Times Senior Managing Editor Joe Yanarella yelled "Remember the Alamo!" on the plane ride to Wizard World Texas

37 Pounds of beef consumed by the Wizard staffers attending the Texas show

33 Pounds of beef consumed by Managing Editor Andy Serwin in BBQ form!

mastthead

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IF WE HAD X-RAY VISION No underwear would be off limits!
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SUPERMAN/SUPERGIRL by Jim Lee, Michael Turner and Scott Williams; color by Alex Sinclair
SPIDER-MAN Courtesy of Sony Entertainment

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WIZARD: THE COMICS MAGAZINE, volume one, issue one forty-eight (#148), February 2004.

Please direct all editorial-related inquiries to Wizard Editorial Dept., 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920-2064 (or Fax: 845-268-0053). Please address all subscription/renewal/comic and any other concerns to: Customer Service, c/o Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Avenue, Congers, NY 10920. One-year subscription rate is $29.95 (Canada $48.00, all other countries $70.00). All payments in U.S. funds only.

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WIZARD: THE COMICS MAGAZINE (ISSN 1065-6499) is published monthly by Gareb Shamus Enterprises Inc., D.B.A. Wizard Entertainment, 151 Wells Ave., Congers, NY 10920-2064. Periodical postage paid at Congers, NY and additional mailing offices. NOT ALONG ENCLOSED. Postmaster: Send address changes to WIZARD ENTERTAINMENT, PO Box 650, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598.

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ENVELOPE ART

'KINGDOM COME' FLASH

DAN QUILLES, Mahwah, NJ

Dirty, rotten, filthy comics... Unabashed Bendis bashing... And the secret of the real Lois Lane?

I love getting complaints.

No, really. And it's not because I'm some sort of sadistic, negativity-craving nut. I just get stoked whenever fans care enough to get off their butts and write to little ol' me whenever they get riled up about the books they read, or the creators who write them, or the movies and TV shows they spawn. That there's passion, and I admire it. So keep those complaints coming!

Unless they're about us—in which case, just keep 'em to yourself, ya hear?

Ha ha, just kidding.

Er, sort of.

Magic Words,

I used to love reading *Wizard*.

Every month I would hear about what was going on in the comic industry, laugh at Jim McLauchlin's witty replies to the average disgruntled fanboy and hear honest feedback from a magazine that would tell me what was good about comics and what wasn't. In the last couple of years, *Wizard* has gone through many different changes. I still get feedback—I like how Picks gives me reasons why I should pick up a book and Heat Index is always great. But what happened to the days when *Wizard* would crap all over books that they didn't like? Even Book of the Month has pretty much turned into ad space for Marvel or DC.

Wizard has come a long way over the years, and has improved a great deal, but I still think the magazine could be a lot better if you simply remember what made the magazine cool in the first place (or rather what made it cool in the late '90s). All I can really say is that this magazine has to remember its past to improve on its future.

ADAM MASON
Sudbury, Ontario, Canada

Trust me, we're all about looking behind us.

I, too, remember the days when I would pick up *Wizard* as a fan and watch in awe as the staff ripped apart the books they disliked. And while these tirades were certainly entertaining, you've gotta remember that *Wizard* has grown into something more than a fanzine: We've become an unofficial ambassador for the comics industry.

Pompous-sounding? Maybe. But the fact is, we're one of the main conduits through which new fans and casual readers alike are introduced to this medium we love so dear. In other words, our job is to get people to read comics.

Which means wasting valuable page space to trash bad books just doesn't make sense. Our job isn't to point out what *not* to read, it's to tell people what they *should* be reading. And all in all, flipping through the past few issues, I think we've done a pretty good job of shining a light on the good stuff. And that's what we'll continue to do.

Dear Wizard,

Over the past few years, I've seen Captain America stab the Red Skull in the back, Thor mutilate some poor alien schmuck with the Blood Ax, Warbird slaughter the Master and the Iron Man armor wipe out a defenseless human. Now they're all cussin' up a storm

QUICKHITS

You sick bastards. How dare you refer to Aquaman "holding his own under water" [in *Wizard* #146]. His own what?!?

JOE GUENTHER
MYDOGPEABODY@EARTHLINK.NET

I just read the best four books of 2003: *Flash* #197-200.

CRAIG JOHNSON
ANDERSON, INDIANA

Wow, Millar's *Spider-Man* series sounds nothing like *Batman: Hush* (dripping with sarcasm).

LITTLEZ31@AOL.COM

Woo wee, hot dang! I just saw clips from "The Punisher" on "Access Hollywood," and I am totally sized.

CARLOS GUZMAN
CALUCASG@JUNO.COM

Please give [writer] Joe Kelly a huge pat on the back. He's done an outstanding job with his *JLA* arc "Trial By Fire."

ERIC RODRIGUEZ
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

With the addition of *Ultimate FF*, the cornerstones of the Marvel U. (Spidey, the Avengers, the FF and the X-Men) have been faithfully transformed. Keep it at four titles.

DAN FAUST
OUTTALUCK76@YAHOO.COM

The new Catwoman [movie] costume is laughable.

JEREMY GUERRIERI
CLEVELAND, OHIO

Say what will you will about that Catwoman costume, but Halle Berry looks damn sexy!

MATT HOOPER
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Look at what Bendis is doing for *Daredevil*. Imagine if Grant Morrison was still on *JLA*, or Warren Ellis on *The Authority*. That's why I prefer extended runs for creative teams.

AZEEM CHOUDHURY
ZIMZYMA@HOTMAIL.COM

The best thing in comics is watching a creative team gel over a course of years. In today's market, we'd never see the Byrne/Claremont *X-Men* run—and that's a shame.

OTHELLADUB@AOL.COM

Maybe Richard Ho was too busy playing HORSE to do some research on his Christian Bale sidebar [*Wizard* #146], because Bale's not an Aussie. He's from Wales.

PAUL BELLIVEAU
PBELLIVEAU@NYC.RR.COM

What do you think of THIS issue? Let us know. Send an e-mail to: magicwords@wizarduniverse.com and be heard...er, read.

and having naughty sex. I understand that the trend now is to be a tough guy, just like it was cool in the '90s to have big boobs and a whole lotta spikes. But I don't swear at my kids (and they read *Avengers*, too), and neither should the Avengers.

Seriously, when did it become acceptable to print "damn," "ass," "bastard" and "hell" in Marvel comics? Who said it was okay to murder? Why did I have to see Ant-Man and Wasp getting busy? If I can believe certain people can fly, shoot laser beams out their eyes or grow to 50 feet, I have to believe those same people can find a better way to resolve their conflicts than through murder and swearing. I also have the right not to wonder where Ant-Man was poking his proboscis.

JAY MARTIN
Springfield, MA

According to Marvel editor Axel Alonso (who's had plenty of experience walking on the edge with his current books like *X-Statix* and the MAX *Punisher*), seeing Cap and co. viciously ripping into baddies ain't necessarily a bad thing. "First of all, the bad guys deserved it," laughs Alonso. "But the key thing to understand is that there's a diversity of material and sensibilities in comic books that didn't exist when we were kids—from books like *The Ultimates* down to the more kiddie-friendly stuff—and we've gotta have that to survive. Besides, comics certainly don't outpace other media in this regard. Stuff in movies and prime-time TV far surpasses the content we normally have."

And in some cases, mature content has actually been dialed down to encourage more readers to pick up a book—witness the relaunch of the MAX title *Alias* as the PG-rated *Pulse*.

But edgy still sells—and Ant-Man's proboscis is here to stay.

Wizened Wizard folk,

I am very disappointed in the lack of precognitive ability displayed by your staff when it comes to the future of Chloe Sullivan ("Plans of Steel," *Wizard* #145). As a longtime Superman fanboy, I think it's pretty obvious that Chloe at some point chooses the pen name Lois Lane.

Think about it for a sec. When she finds that no one but *The Inquisitor* will publish her "Wall of Weird" stories, she changes her name and starts anew in Metropolis. Or maybe Chloe's dad turns in state's evidence on Luthorcorp, and he and Chloe are put into the witness protection program and given the new name.

Betcha a beer that Jeph Loeb stammers a bit (in that oh-crap-you-caught-on-to-us way) if you ask him about it.

ROB CERIO
New Orleans, LA

DIDJA KNOW?

Allison Mack (Chloe on "Smallville") got her first acting gig in "Police Academy 6."

That's nuts. So nuts, in fact, that it might actually work!

Or not. "Beers are on you, pal—I like mine so cold you can only get it in Antarctica," says Loeb. "Having penned 'Red,' which will be the last witness protection story even if 'Smallville' runs 100 years, Chloe's fate isn't going to be in the hands of the Feds. Besides, it's pretty established that Chloe and Lois are cousins. But, you may want to catch an episode this season called 'Delete,' written by the 'Smallville' dream team of Kelly Souders and Brian Peterson, for further Chloe/Lois revelations!"

But hey, points for thinking outside the box.

Dear Wizard,

I've been enjoying the new format, but something is missing. Suddenly, it hit me: Last Man Standing! It was so cool to see characters that would never meet get together and fight. Is there any chance of bringing it back?

PAUL COLAVECCHIA
Vancouver, B.C.

If I had a nickel for every Last Man Standing letter I *still* get, I'd have a lot of nickels. But, after doing a bajillion of these things over the course of many issues, we started running out of marquee matchups. You can only do so many "Batman vs. Captain America" battles before you start hitting "Rocket Raccoon vs. Flaming Carrot."

Not that it wouldn't make for a fascinating brawl—but you get the picture.

Dear Wizard,

I know you recently revamped your magazine, but could you maybe consider making it the exact same size as the girly magazines? 'Cuz that way when my mom finds them under my mattress she won't call my dad at work to give me a good "talking to." Thanks.

KEN TURNER
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Okay, but just make sure you don't mistakenly use our mag for—you know, that other thing.

Unless we have that kind of effect on you. Whatever floats your boat...

Wizard,

I've been a Marvel fan for 20 years, and while I feel the last two to three years have produced some of the best comics in the company's history, don't you feel it's time for Marvel to truly expand its horizons and publish books that don't center on the established Marvel Universe?

Focusing on titles that do not feature men in tights (or their supporting cast) can only increase your fan base. Independent comics like *Hepcats*, *Cerebus* and *Maus* mix fantastic elements with real life situations. A book like *Strangers in Paradise* would be labeled a "drama" if it were a motion picture.

MICHAEL POIRIER
Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Couldn't agree more.

From independent companies like Image and Devil's Due to small press houses like Top Shelf, Com.X and Oni Press, more and more fans are clamoring for books that fall far from the Marvel and DC superhero trees.

And we hear ya. *Wizard*'s gradually finding new ways to cover the plethora of non-Big Two books that populate the comic landscape. Our Secret Stash column, which spotlights a kickass indie read every month, is one way. Our annual *Wizard Edge* special—on sale March 17, kiddies!—is another.

Did I mention *Edge* goes on sale in March? Shameless, shameless.

Dear God,

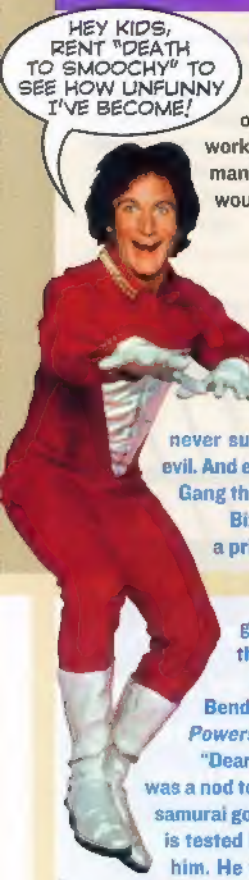
Bless my mother, and my father, and everyone else in my family, but most importantly, kick Brian Michael Bendis off *Ultimate X-Men*, 'cuz the only purpose of his run so far has been to (a) promote his other books (namely *Daredevil* and *Ultimate Spider-Man*) and (b) tie these characters by pure chance to Wolverine, in an extremely thin-on-story arc. God, please get Marvel to bring back Mark Millar.

Note: In an ironic twist, Mark Millar may actually *be* God.

JEFF BROWN
Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

"Dear God"? As my ex-girlfriend will eagerly proclaim, I am no

WEIRDOMAIL



Dear Wizard,

I would like the Wizard Bunny to join my team of supervillians. At the moment we only consist of myself, Yogi Bear (he needed work) and Robin Williams (have you seen the man's body hair?), but I am assured that we would be unstoppable if he joined our ranks.

EVIL MONKEY
the_evilmonkey@hotmail.com

The Wizard Bunny disagrees. In fact, he thinks you'd be eminently stoppable, even with his considerable might on your side. Besides, the Wizard Bunny is a being of pure integrity who would never succumb to the temptations of crime and evil. And even if he did, he'd sooner join the Injustice Gang than your pitiful band of zoo rejects.

Bizarro Bunny, however, can be bought...for a price.

god. Not even a demi-god. But I appreciate the sentiment.

As for your complaint, how 'bout we get Bendis himself to make like this here space is the *Powers* letters page? Try to keep up, kids...

"Dear God, please tell this guy that my X-Men story was a nod to Akira Kurosawa samurai movies where the samurai goes on a trek and he meets other samurai and is tested in battle," says Bendis. "What? No, you tell him. He won't listen to me. I sound like an assh--- when I say stuff like that out loud. What, God? You say that Millar is actually Satan himself walking on earth? That does explain a lot. Oh, and God, bring back *American Flagg*. And please tell *Wizard* that bunny suit joke is disturbing."

Hmm. Somehow, I expected more cussin'.

Magic Ho,

When I read that Mark Millar was doing a Spider-Man title, I got really excited. *But*, I can't believe he's going to base his series on someone learning Spider-Man's secret identity! That is possibly the most unoriginal plot idea I've heard in the last year. Not only has it been used in *Daredevil* twice, it was used in *Batman: Hush*, not to mention in the Spider-Man books several times. It's a ridiculously overused plot device. Could you call Mr. Millar and *beg* him to reconsider?

MIKE SIMON
Indianapolis, Indiana

I'll call him, but do I really have to beg?

Here's how Millar responded to my groveling: "Just trust me, it'll be really, really, really good!" laughs the Scottish scribe. "I want the whole thing to be made up of lots of little stories, rather than take one villain and make it into a six- or eight-part story. In that sense, I'm kind of doing the perfect little Electro story, and then the perfect little Vulture story, and just sort of getting everyone I've ever wanted to write as a Spider-Man fan in this thing. So it's really like a fanboy orgasm!"

And that's the best kind, kiddies.

Dear Magic Words,

I want to quickly give you information about my 3-year-old niece, Kathy Falk. She has Rett Syndrome (**www.rettsyndrome.org**), and I've been raising awareness about her in the comic community.

Last summer, the creative team of CrossGen's *Brath* put together a charity sale on eBay, where all the money raised went to help find a cure for Kathy. Dark Horse's merchandising department sent an autographed copy of *The Book of Hauntings*. Dan Jurgens autographed 14 issues of *Tomb Raider* to be donated. I was stunned by James O'Barr's donation—he signed many different pictures and donated them to help Kathy. Mike and Angie Bullock from Broken Frontier sent three autographed *Sojourn* #25 comics.

Sometimes, it's easy to be negative of comic book companies, from the cost of issues to the content of stories and many other things. But right now, I would like to say that I am proud of the support given by the entire comic book community and others who are helping to make Kathy's life better.

ALLEN KLINGELHOETS
Barron, WI

DIDJA KNOW?

In 2002, John Romita Jr. did Spider-Man sketches for 51 hours in Time Squre to benefit his own niece.

Nothing like a dose of reality to bring us all back down to earth.

Say what you will about this business—but as this letter proves, there really are some fine, fine folks who work in the comics industry. Cheers to them, and best of luck to little Kathy.

And if you feel compelled to help out in any way you can, feel free to contact Allen Klingelhoets at 9 South 9th St., Barron, WI, 54812.

Not in a complainin' mood anymore, are ya? Ha! Didn't think so. But fret not, you'll get another chance to sound off in exactly one lunar month. Until then, get crackin' on breaking all those fancy-schmancy New Year's resolutions you just made. I know I will.

Sinfully,

Richard Ho

Staff Writer Richard Ho has one definite New Year's resolution: track down the guy from that Paris Hilton tape and shake his hand.

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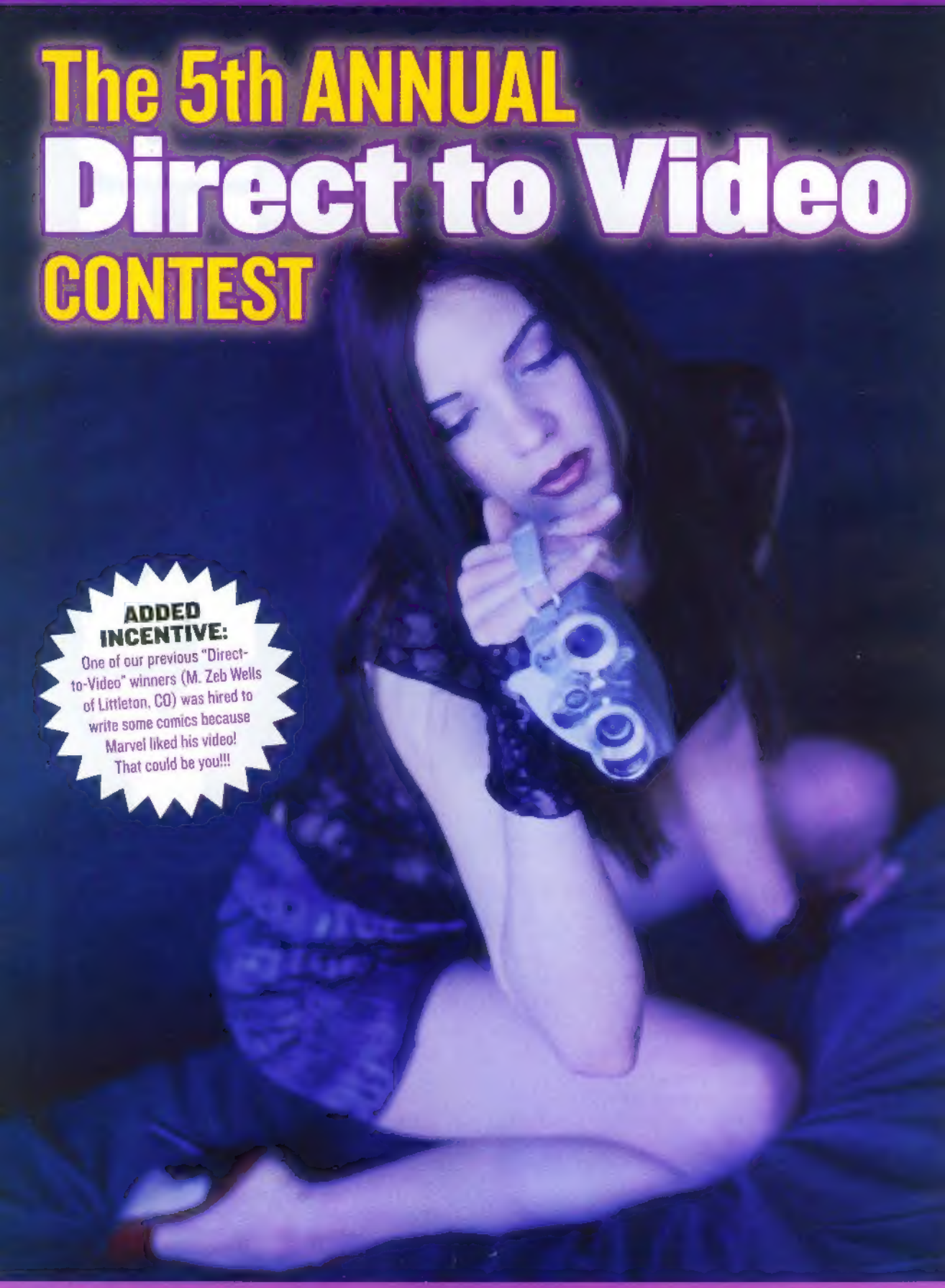
The 5th ANNUAL Direct to Video CONTEST



ADDED INCENTIVE:
One of our previous "Direct-to-Video" winners (M. Zeb Wells of Littleton, CO) was hired to write some comics because Marvel liked his video! That could be you!!!

WEST WING-HEAD

A look inside the White House of Ideas!

By the Wizard Staff • Illustration by Ryan Dunlavey

"GIVE A CRAP—VOTE FOR CAP!"

That's the campaign button all of Marveldom will wear if *Captain America*'s new creative team, writer Robert Morales (*Truth*) and artist Chris Bachalo (*New X-Men*), get their way. That's right, it's rumored that the Sentinel of Liberty might make a run for the Oval Office! And should Cap become the country's Avenger-in-Chief, you know what that means—he's gonna need a Cabinet. Here are our picks for the Captain America White House!

1. SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

Who better to be in charge of our nation's farmland than someone who's *made* of our nation's farmland? As for the livestock...let's just hope they're not afraid of anything, or they might spontaneously flame-broil at the **Man-Thing**'s touch!

2. SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

There's trouble in the Interior? This is a job for **Ant-Man**! He'll shrink down and hide in a bowl of cornflakes, and once ingested, battle his way through the intestinal track until he—okay, we have no idea what the Secretary of the Interior does.

3. SECRETARY OF LABOR

No one could fill this position like Susan Richards, a.k.a. the **Invisible Woman**. Her qualifications? Hasn't she given birth, like, 17 times?

4. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Iron Man's already up for this job, as seen in recent developments in his own book. Who better to look out for our defense than the inventor of the ultimate weapon...and the six-martini lunch? So long as he doesn't have to pee in a cup, he's golden.

5. SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

We need a man that's all business. Who better than Wilson "F with Me and Your Grandchildren are Tiger Food" Fisk, **The Kingpin**? Leave it to Fisk to make sure the government keeps businesses honest. And obscenely profitable.

6. SECRETARY OF JUSTICE

So what if **Daredevil** keeps walking into those concrete posts? The Man Without Fear would be perfect in tweaking the books to improve justice. Just keep him and Commerce on separate floors.

7. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

There's no way we could overlook **Mr. Fantastic** when it comes to the Poindexter position. He'd probably have the time of his boring life molding the apathetic minds of the future. Let him.

8. SECRETARY OF ENERGY

Three words for **Electro**: Goodbye, rolling blackouts!

9. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

Ask yourself one question about this position: Who gets around more than Natasha Romanova, the **Black Widow**? Answer: no one (she's slept with just about everyone but Northstar).

10. SECRETARY OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

We humbly nominate Dr. Curt Connors, better known by his sometime alter ego **the Lizard**! He's a brilliant man of medicine, but his cures often have wacky results. Health care is so damn expensive, we might as well get a few laughs in the process.

11. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Illegal immigrants are going to have one hell of a time crossing into America as soon as **Arcade** is in charge of Homeland Security! Once our borders become an endless maze of pinball flippers, trap doors and whizzing saw blades, minimum-wage crap jobs will once again be staffed by Americans. The way they should be.

12. SECRETARY OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Luke Cage. Because the Secretary of Urban Development needs to know which direction the pimps and hos go (up and down, respectively).

13. SECRETARY OF STATE

Forging positive relationships with foreign powers is the order of the day, so who better to fill this role than **Professor X**? Hell, think about it, people! We'll have the Swiss jumping on landmines for us once Charlie gets done throwin' the ol' mind-jinx on 'em.

14. SECRETARY OF TREASURY

To handle America's money, you need someone reared in and accustomed to wealth, in other words, a good ol' White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. What's that spell? **Wasp**, a.k.a. Janet Van Dyne!

15. SECRETARY OF VETERAN AFFAIRS

Wolverine has apparently fought in every war since the Yankees fought the Rebs. But we'll go with **Nick Fury** instead—full benefits for all former commandos, howling and otherwise. And imagine doddering old veterans flying around in free Hover-Cars. Duck and cover, kids!

Justin Aclin, Tom Root, Jake Rossen and Andy Serwin contributed to this travesty of politics.

CREATORS AROUND THE

OREGON The true nexus of the comic universe exists in Portland, Ore., specifically Greg Rucka's garage. "It's like a convention," says resident superscribe Brian Michael Bendis. "Greg's doing Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, I'm doing Spider-Man, Daredevil, X-Men—every major icon's being picked at from there." Throw in other area creators like Matthew Clark, Rachel and Terry Dodson, Pete and Rebecca Woods, Randy Bowen, Kurt Busiek, Alex Maleev, Matt Wagner and publishers Oni and Dark Horse and Portland's a hotbed indeed!

CHICAGO Professionally, Chicagoan Brian Azzarello's most closely associated with *100 Bullets* artists Eduardo Risso and Dave Johnson. Geographically (and personally come to think of it), he's a lot closer with *Scary Godmother* creator Jill Thompson (his wife) and *JLA: Liberty and Justice*'s Alex Ross, who lives a few miles away. And while Ross has no plans to try and supplant Risso or Johnson on *100 Bullets*, he says it is "feasible" that he could some day work with his Eisner Award-winning neighbor.

KENTUCKY Brian Michael Bendis, in a running gag in the *Powers* letter column, had taken to telling people that all submissions for all comic companies ran through one particular P.O. box in Bromley, Ky.—which actually belongs to pal and collaborator David Mack! "That was one of the many funny, nonsense things we've been involved with," laughs Mack. "I didn't get the connection at first, but I get all sorts of non-Kabuki mail from people applying to image."

NEW YORK Superhero central, plain and simple, the Big Apple boasts a comic résumé unmatched by any city in the United States. It's home to both Marvel and DC, which, in turn means it's the home of more creators than we have room to print, which, in turn, also means it's seen more visiting creators than we have time to name, which, in turn, means it's got more than its fair share of "comic" hangouts, like Josie Wood's, a pub near Washington Square Park that's served up pints to Joe Quesada, Garth Ennis, Jimmy Palmiotti and others.

CALIFORNIA Lots of West Coast creators reside in the Golden State (way too many to list here!), but three of the biggest—Jeph Loeb, Geoff Johns and Michael Turner—have been spotted around L.A. chowing down at a local, family Italian restaurant called Fab's, breaking bread and dining on the joint's pasta, salads and sandwiches.

PENNSYLVANIA The Frazetta Estate in East Stroudsburg, Penn. is not only home to Frank Frazetta and the Frazetta Museum. It's been a destination for some rather high-profile tourists, including Sylvester Stallone and Clint Eastwood, both of whom visited with the classic fantasy artist.

WISCONSIN Sandman creator Neil Gaiman lives in Wisconsin, specifically, in the town of Menomonie. Seems like an odd choice for a *New York Times* best selling author, but Gaiman revels in the innate weirdness of the Badger State, where he can take his children to places like the "House on the Rock," (**www.thehouseontherock.com**) an architectural aberration he's publicly described as "an artifically created Grandma's house that goes on forever, and whenever it occurs to them that it doesn't go on forever enough, they put up a giant new addition."

ARIZONA Dave Johnson, Brian Pulido and members of Team Red Star all have ties to Tucson, Ariz., which is the headquarters of the Universal Life Church, through which all of the above creators have become ordained ministers. "The tenets of the Universal Life Church are very simple," says Red Star head honco Christian Gossset. "There are three of them: food, freedom and sexuality. I've actually performed a wedding and funeral ceremony."

ARGENTINA Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? Argentines, apparently. Few artists can capture the interplay of shadows and light or gripping scenes of darkness and redemption like Eisner and Harvey Award winner Eduardo Risso (*Batman*, *100 Bullets*) and his up-and-coming colleague Leandro Fernandez (*The Incredible Hulk*, *Wolverine*)

WORLD

WIZARD goes globetrotting to present wacky tales of comic pros from around the planet

by Christopher Lawless, Michael Jo and Brad Dimeris

SCOTLAND Scotland's more than just home to Mark Millar, Frank Quitely and Grant Morrison, among others; it's also one of the world's more progressive, comic-friendly locales (which may, in part, be why it's home to Millar, Quitely and Morrison). "There are a number of educational and community-based initiatives [in Scotland] getting 'ordinary' people in schools, prisons, etc., to produce comic work for a variety of reasons," Quitely explains. "There's a tradition of comic artists and writers giving talks and workshops, too. Robbie Morrison (*The Authority*) and I used to do a mean double act."

JAPAN Given that manga sales in Japan amount to more than $5 *billion* (!) annually, it's no wonder *Inuyasha* creator Rumiko Takahashi reportedly takes in over $5 million per year, making her the highest paid comic book creator in the world.

FRANCE The French, it seems, can't do anything right except sell comic books. Humanoids Publishing—*Les Humanoïdes Associés* in France—home of Moebius, *Metal Hurlant* and Travis Charest, sold more than 425,000 copies of a comic called *December 32* this summer, outselling *Batman*, *Ultimate X-Men* and *New X-Men* combined.

ITALY Soon-to-be superstar Gabriele Dell'Otto (*Secret War*) says of his hometown Rome, "the comic community isn't very strong, but those who do love comics here nearly developed a cult over them!" Count us in; pass the Kool-Aid!

SPAIN Spain has inspired architects, artists (Carlos Pacheco and Salvador Larocca both reside here) and writers for centuries—but maybe never in quite the way it motivated Peter Milligan and Grant Morrison. While walking down a Barcelona street, the two saw a pornographic homosexual magazine called *Bizarre Boys*, which inspired an as-yet unproduced creative endeavor of the same name. "We had a kind of mental intercourse [upon seeing the name of the magazine]," Milligan has said, "a porno epiphany when our two minds were, for a bizarre moment, united."

NEPAL Grant Morrison isn't the only comic creator who's visited to the Himalayas for inspiration. Writer/artist Jeff Smith, who is himself an Ohio guy, spent several weeks in Nepal and India doing research for the conclusion of *Bone*.

BRAZIL Brazil has, at various times, served as home to Mike Deodato Jr. (*The Incredible Hulk*), Luke Ross (*Scion*), A. Rio (*BVD*), Ed Benes (*Birds of Prey*), Fabio Laguna (*Dragon's Lair*) and Manny Clark (*Tomb Raider: Journeys*). Seem like a lot? Keep in mind Brazil's a big place. A really big place. So big, in fact, that Benes—working on a tight deadline for a WildStorm project—once had to spend a full day on a bus just to reach the nearest FedEx location where he could send off his artwork!

AUSTRALIA Think the Land Down Under's all sun, sand and shrimp on the barbie? Think again. Australia's the address of choice for three of the industry's "darkest" stars, masters of the macabre: Ashley Wood (*Hellspawn*, *Popbot*), Ben Templesmith (*30 Days of Night*) and Eddie Campbell (*From Hell*).

2004 PREV

VIEW

From barbarians to Byrne/Claremont, WIZARD spotlights the 10 buzz events that will rock the New Year and dishes the dirt on over 100 of your favorite titles

By the Wizard Staff

10 | CONAN (Dark Horse)

Call it "Ultimate Conan." After almost 20 years out of the spotlight, the iconic barbarian smashes his way back into comics and gets stripped down to his roots.

Between the launch of his new series and one-time "Conan" actor Arnold Schwarzenegger taking the governorship of California, February kicks off a banner year for comics' premier barbarian.

Following the white-hot 25-cent prequel that sold over 100,000 copies in initial orders, the ongoing *Conan* series from writer Kurt Busiek (*JLA/Avengers*) and artist Cary Nord (*Daredevil*) will send the sword-slinging warrior on a series of adventures adapted from Robert E. Howard's original novels. While staying true to the source material, Busiek and Nord chose to pick up their tale with a 16-year old Conan just weeks after he first leaves his home village of Cimmeria.

In the first arc, Conan joins up with a band of Northerners for a number of raids before entering Hyperborea, the oldest and most decadent of the ancient civilizations. Following that storyline, Conan plunges his savage sword into a civilized world (for barbaric lands, anyway) with the second arc based on Howard's story "The God in the Bull."

"It's a locked-room murder mystery in which Conan goes to a building to steal something and finds somebody dead who couldn't possibly have been killed by anyone who came in from outside," reveals Busiek. "That's the first story that involves Conan and Thoth-Amon, his greatest enemy."

While political struggles will be an important part of the conflict between the unsullied barbarian and a corrupt, decaying civilization, Busiek and Nord aren't skimping on the monster slaying.

"There are everything from ape-men to albino giants to giant spiders to giant snakes," teases Busiek. "Just take 'giant' and put a deadly animal behind it!"

Before Nord officially came aboard, a whopping 22 artists threw their names in the ring for the coveted gig of handling the art chores on *Conan*. TODD CASEY

CROMS AWAY Want Conan to run you through with his blade? Make fun of his mullet.

9 | ULTIMATES VOL. 2 (Marvel)

PUT THE HAMMER DOWN In the new *Ultimates* series, Thor gets distracted easily by shiny objects.

Marvel's top-selling *Ultimates* relaunches with a second volume by writer Mark Millar and artist Bryan Hitch, jam-packed with widescreen action and explosive surprises.

As "Empire Strikes Back," "X2" and "Aliens" prove, sometimes sequels are better than the originals, and fans might just add *Ultimates* Vol. 2 to the list if writer Mark Millar has his way.

Relaunching one of the top-selling titles in comics isn't easy, but Millar says he's well equipped for the job. February's *Ultimates* Vol. 2 #1 picks up a year after the events of January's Vol. 1 #13—the final story of the first "film," as Millar refers to it.

"A lot can change in a year," says the writer. "[Iron Man] is getting rather sick because of his brain tumor. He's not in the best of health. Captain America's going out with the Wasp. [Giant-Man] is out of the team completely—no one's returning his calls."

Focusing on the global reaction to the Ultimates team, Millar explains that superhero groups are popping up everywhere, from Europe to apartments in New York.

"People like Tigra are starting off like they're just forming a band," says the writer. "But the biggest thing going on in the first six-issue arc involves the Hulk."

According to Millar, Bruce Banner will be outed as the Hulk in the newspapers and receives a very cold reception from the public, including calls to put him on trial for the over 800 deaths he caused in *Ultimates* (vol. 1) #5.

"You get the 'Trial of the Incredible Hulk,' first," divulges Millar. "That's two issues, then we see Giant-Man's life and Cap and Wasp's relationship as well as some big revelations about Thor and whether or not he's really the God of Thunder."

While most fans complain about the bimonthly shipping *Ultimates*, few of those same fans notice that each issue usually has up to four extra pages of story. MIKE COTTON

8 | BYRNE/CLAREMONT REUNITE (DC Comics)

It's only the single most anticipated reunion in the last 25 years. Legendary X-Men creators John Byrne and Chris Claremont re-team to put their stamp on DC's own iconic superteam

It took all of DC's greatest heroes to make it happen—but comics' dream team is back together again.

Starting with March's *JLA* #94, Chris Claremont and John Byrne rekindle the magic of their X-years by collaborating on a six-issue tale entitled "The Tenth Circle "

"The Tenth Circle is a cult of apparently immortal vampiric characters who are preying on the Justice League," reveals editor Mike Carlin "Byrne is penciling up a storm and [inker Jerry] Ordway is making it look really sweet."

And the story ain't too shabby, either. "There are a number of twists and turns and exciting revelations," promises Claremont, who provides dialogue for the story (Byrne plots and pencils). "I hope this entire arc surprises people and will be remembered as a landmark moment."

Look for a lineup that includes Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, John Stewart, the Flash, Martian Manhunter, the Atom and Faith—all getting equal play "One of the hallmarks of the team is that it functions very impressively as a team," insists Claremont. "Do the individual characters have moments within the arc? Damn straight But this is a team effort."

How did DC go about engineering the Byrne/Claremont reunion? "Well, I routinely bugged both of them over the years," laughs Carlin. "It's been working out very smoothly, and both guys are excited. John told me he hasn't had this much fun in years."

1981's *Uncanny X-Men* #143 was the last full issue in the Byrne/Claremont run, but the *very* last time they teamed up on the merry mutants was for a four-page sequence in 1991's *Uncanny X-Men* #273 RICHARD HO

DRYING MR. WAYNE With the Bat-Boat in the shop, Batman enjoyed the convenience of his bubble chair.

7 | ORIGIN 2 (Marvel)

NO HIGH FIVES After years of thinking they're for fancy lads, Logan finally decided it was time for a manicure.

The *Origin* team of writer Paul Jenkins and artist Andy Kubert returns to unlock even more mysteries about everyone's favorite mutant badass.

Marvel just won't let Wolverine keep his secrets.

Starting mid-2004, Paul Jenkins (*Wolverine: The End*) will begin peeling back more layers of Wolverine's murky past with artists Andy Kubert and painter Richard Isanove (*1602*) helping to expose what lies beneath the mutant's grizzled persona in the new *Origin 2* series—the format of which is as much of a mystery as the man himself

"All these questions in the current stories—How did he become the way he is? Where did he learn his love for Japan? How did he first attract the attention of Weapon X?" poses Jenkins "All of these things remain out there and will come out in the subtext "

Kubert bolsters a near-tangible excitement to return to the early years of the fuzzy mutant (Isanove will paint over Kubert's tight pencils). "Wolverine is one of my all-time favorite characters to draw," gushes Kubert. "Just to be able to return to continue and chart his life further is a thrill "

Keeping the early 20th century setting, Jenkins picks up shortly after the events of *Origin* left off. Crippled by the loss of his beloved Rose, James Howlett wanders into the Canadian wilderness, but as fans know, no matter where Wolverine goes, danger always heads him off at the pass.

"I think we're really looking at creating an adventure," Jenkins says. "All these stories are metaphors, so for him this is like getting older, doing drugs, meeting chicks—it's that kind of thing. It's him going out into the world and going, 'Okay, I've got these great big f---ing claws and a bad attitude, lets see what happens.'"

While the format of the series is a mystery, rumors swirl that *Origin 2* could be anything from a series of minis to a full ongoing series. TC

6 | 'SPIDER-MAN' BY MILLAR (Marvel)

Trouble collaborators Mark Millar and Terry Dodson re-team for *Spider-Man*, a 12-issue story already being compared to *Batman*'s "Hush."

When it comes to writing Spider-Man, Mark Millar's doing a little wall-crawling of his own.

Best known for the widescreen action and adult-oriented dialogue in *The Ultimates*, Millar fulfills a childhood dream this April as he launches *Spider-Man*, a new Web-head title with artist Terry Dodson. While Millar may be known for crafting scenes of anal rape, male-on-male make-out sessions and jaw-shattering fight scenes, his Spider-Man will be as close to classic as the Scottish writer can make it.

Referred to by some Marvel insiders as "Spider-Man: Shush"—playing off the highly successful *Batman* "Hush" 12-issue run—Millar reveals that the new series, which could become an ongoing after its initial run, revolves around one person figuring out Spider-Man's secret identity and turning the crimefighter's life upside down by putting his most loved relatives in jeopardy.

"It's made up of a lot smaller stories but it's all one big story," says Millar slyly. "In the first issue, Peter finds out that Uncle Ben's grave has been destroyed and he also learns that someone knows he's Spider-Man. With each new issue, there's a major villain with a new twist on them. I want to make sure fans know that Spider-Man's been doing this for years and he's got the scars and bruises to prove it."

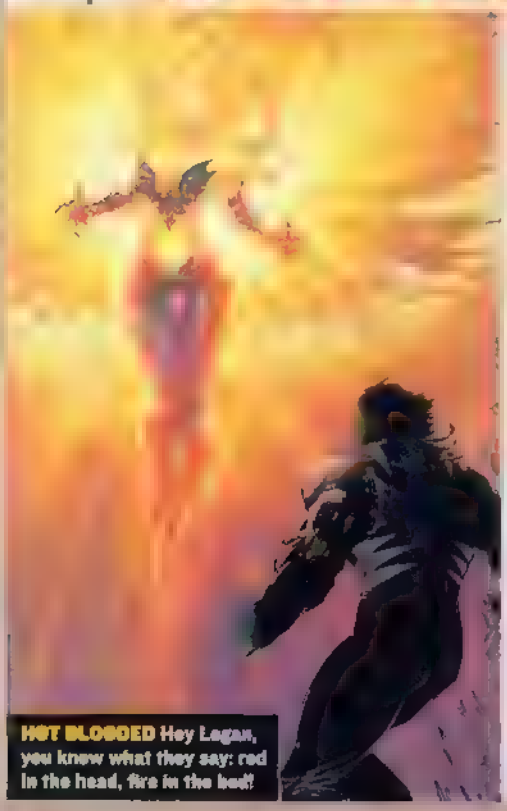
However, the scribe admits that writing Spider-Man does bring a smile to his face.

"It's funny to write a character who's not an a--hole," chuckles Millar. "Most of my characters are real pricks, and Spider-Man's such a nice guy. It's cool."

A longtime Spidey fan, Millar now finds himself unable to stop writing the Web-head, even during mass, where he's often seen scribbling story ideas on hymnals and the back of his hand. **MC**

PRACTICE MAKES PARKER It took weeks, but Spidey finally perfected the "no pinky" swing.

5 | SILVESTRI'S NEW X-MEN (Marvel)



HOT BLOODED Hey Logan, you know what they say: red in the head, fire in the bed!

After years of running Top Cow Productions, artist Marc Silvestri steps back from his administrative duties to pencil the final, epic arc of writer Grant Morrison's *New X-Men* run.

Marc Silvestri's going from Top Cow to top dog this January.

After making his mark at Marvel Comics on titles such as *Uncanny X Men* and *Wolverine* before co-founding Image and starting Top Cow 11 years ago, Silvestri's following fellow Image founder Jim Lee's lead back into mainstream superhero comics with his debut on January's *New X-Men* #151 for writer Grant Morrison's final four-issue arc.

Silvestri says that while most details of the story—set 150 years in the X-Men's future—are top secret, the arc has been compared by some insiders to the classic "Days of Future Past" saga.

"It's safe to say that mutants are the dominant part of the populace, and human beings are the absolute minority, so that creates interesting dynamics right off the bat," discloses Silvestri. "What was good is bad, in some cases. In the future, the heroes we're used to seeing today maybe aren't heroes."

Pitting an X-Men team of Wolverine, Cassandra Nova and the Stepford Cuckoos, among others, against the biblical "Beast of the Apocalypse," Morrison says the story will bring to a close one of his major subplots in his 41-issue run—the Phoenix.

"There's a whole new look at what it means to be the Phoenix and exactly what the duties and responsibilities of such a creature might be," explains Morrison. "The main villain is the biblical 'beast' of [the book of] Revelations. Who he really is and what he's up to will be revealed. This final arc brings to the fore some deeply hidden plot threads from early issues of *New X-Men*. Everything gets tied together in this one."

During his uninterrupted run writing *New X-Men*, Grant Morrison has worked with eight artists: Frank Quitely, Ethan Van Sciver, Igor Kordey, John Paul Leon, Keron Grant, Chris Bachalo, Phil Jimenez and Marc Silvestri. **MC**

4 | MICHAEL TURNER (DC Comics)

At last, Michael Turner takes on mainstream superhero comics by tackling their greatest icons—Superman and Batman—before launching into a solid year of Aspen Comics releases.

THE LOWDOWN Digging into a full plate of work in 2004, Michael Turner's ecstatic that it's finally dinnertime.

Turner's DC schedule is packed as the artist pencils writer Jeph Loeb's second six-issue *Superman/Batman* arc (the first issue of which is previewed starting on p. 60!), five *Flash* covers for 2004 as well as four Superman covers that tie into studio mate Talent Caldwell's six-issue weekly run on the Superman books (which Turner will also co-write with *JLA* scribe Joe Kelly). In addition, Turner's also finally able to follow up 2003's *Aspen Comics* anthology, including the long-awaited, Loeb-penned *Soulfire* and a relaunch of *Fathom* with Caldwell on art in the fall.

According to Turner, March's *Superman/Batman* #8 teams Supes, Bats and Wonder Woman against a foe powerful enough to destroy them all, as well as introduces a new Supergirl into DC continuity.

"Jeph and I are having a blast," says Turner with excitement. "I've grown to love many different aspects of the DCU that I get to draw. It's going to be quite a ride."

Directly after *Superman/Batman*, Turner jumps onto his second collaboration with Loeb, August's *Soulfire*.

"It keeps getting bigger and better every time I talk with Loeb about it," gushes Turner. "Once the first *Soulfire* storyline wraps up, then I'll most likely move on to *Ekos* with [*Teen Titans* writer] Geoff Johns."

DIDJA KNOW? Although *Superman/Batman* #8 marks Turner's first true foray into mainstream superhero comics, the artist has warmed up by providing a variant cover for *Teen Titans* #1 and a Starfire pin-up in *Teen Titans/Outsiders Secret Files* #1. ■ MC

FEMME FASHION Normally we'd question a skirt worn with a belt, but who's lookin' at the belt?

3 | JIM LEE (DC Comics)

DC rekindles the magic of 2003's *Batman* by putting the No. 1 artist of 2003 on the No. 1 icon in comics. Plus, Lee's teaming with Brian Azzarello, the *100 Bullets* writer who kept the Bat-train chugging after Jeph Loeb and Lee's "Hush" arc.

After rocking the industry throughout 2003 with the "Hush" storyline, Jim Lee looks to engineer the comeback of another industry icon in 2004.

The flagship *Superman* title gets the superstar treatment starting in April with issue #204, the first part of the yearlong "For Tomorrow" run by Lee and acclaimed writer Brian Azzarello.

"The challenge of doing Superman is, can we reinvigorate the Superman franchise?" poses Lee. "He's a harder character to sell because everyone seems to have this perception that he's not as real or relevant as Batman. We're definitely taking a different tack with Superman. It's bigger, it's more epic in scope."

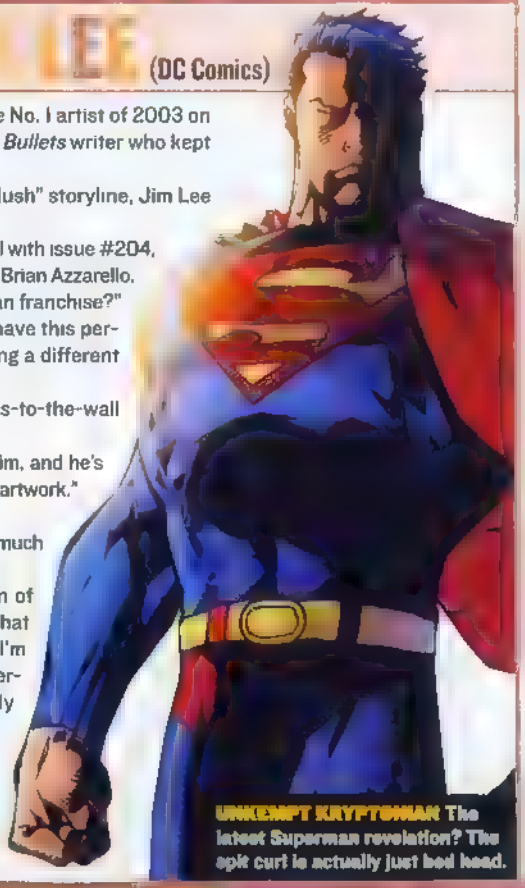
Of course, no Jim Lee book would be complete without plenty of balls-to-the-wall fight scenes—and Azzarello plans to oblige the fans in this regard.

"I tend to write for my artists," says Azzarello. "I'm going to challenge Jim, and he's experimenting with different sorts of things. Fans won't be disappointed in the artwork." But don't expect the action to dominate the story.

"It's quieter," notes the scribe. "But the quiet moments make the action that much more explosive and violent."

But one thing's for sure—fans can expect to see a whole new Man of Steel. "People are going to be surprised," promises Azzarello. "It's funny that Jim and I are doing a book together. People come to something that I'm working on and something that Jim's working on with two radically different expectations. Hopefully when we're done, you'll have a completely different take on Superman."

Brian Azzarello and Jim Lee were originally planning to collaborate on a Lex Luthor-centric mini-series, which eventually spun out into two different Azzarello projects, both involving an artist named Lee—the Lee Bermejo *Lex Luthor: Man of Steel* mini, and the yearlong run on the *Superman* with Jim Lee. ■ RH



UNKEMPT KRYPTONIAN The latest Superman revelation? The epic curl is actually just bad hair.

2 | SECRET WAR (Marvel)

Writer Brian Michael Bendis (*Ultimate Spider-Man*) forgoes the Ultimate Universe for the mainstream Marvel U. along with Italian painting sensation Gabriele Dell'Otto to team Spider Man, Wolverine and Captain America, among others.

When Marvel declared war, Brian Michael Bendis enlisted as the publisher's first recruit.

Capitalizing on the name value of the mid-'80s *Secret Wars* franchise, Bendis and painter Gabriele Dell'Otto plan to unleash a fevered offensive that the writer says will leave fans crawling for the nearest foxhole. Featuring some of Marvel's top-tier characters, as well as some personal favorites of Bendis, the quarterly shipping series aims at connecting all of Marvel's techno-villains as well as raising the threat level for the Marvel Universe's heroes.

"The series starts out focusing on Luke Cage, Captain America, Nick Fury, Daredevil, Spider Man and Black Widow, but it expands from there," reveals Bendis. "Literally, this is a new way to look at a Marvel Universe event. Nick Fury discovers a secret that connects all of Marvel's technological villains in the Marvel Universe that scares the sh-- out of him."

According to the multiple Wizard Fan Award-winning writer, *Secret War* isn't just a rehash of ideas covered in the first two maxi-series or even a revamp of the Secret Wars concept—the new series incorporates a totally fresh approach that the writer describes as an entirely new way to look at the Marvel Universe.

"The one thing that does hold from the original *Secret Wars* mini-series is the idea that there's something happening in the Marvel Universe that civilians would not know," says Bendis. "We take it one step further than that here. Something bad happens in the Marvel Universe that civilians wouldn't know. It's kind of 'I Know What You Did Last Summer' in the Marvel Universe, because the Secret War already happened and we see the fallout."

WAR ZONE? Daredevil battles a streetlight and Cap protects a van? Don't worry—real villains show up, too.

The series is fully painted by Dell'Otto, a newcomer to the American comics scene who painted covers for Marvel's *The Call*, and Bendis believes the Italian artist may just break into the class of superstar painters by the time the series wraps up with issue #6.

"I think he's got the talent to be up there with [*Kingdom Come* artist] Alex Ross and [*Elektra: Assassin* artist] Bill Sienkiewicz," boasts Bendis. "He's got the goods. Having put him through the mill—as I do with many artists—there isn't anything he hasn't excelled at. I think the last person to really roll up their sleeves and show everyone what they've got was [*Ultimate X-Men* artist] David Finch, and it's the same thing for Gabriele."

Bendis and Dell'Otto began collaborating on *Secret War* over 18 months ago, but since each fully painted issue takes Dell'Otto months to complete, the series will ship quarterly, wrapping in July 2005. ■ MC

IDENTITY CRISIS (DC Comics)

WHY YOU CARE With the gritty realism of *Watchmen*, the scope of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and the staying power of both, *Identity Crisis* promises to be the next great DC epic—a tragic murder mystery that promises many victims and a redefining of the entire DCU from top to bottom.

THE LOWDOWN What happens when an entire universe suffers a crisis of identity? DC fans are about to find out starting in June, as the secret identities of their most beloved heroes take center stage in the seven-issue saga *Identity Crisis*.

"This story is about the families of heroes as much as it is about the heroes," reveals Editor Mike Carlin of the story that promises to shatter the veil of protection provided by secret identities. Writer Brad Meltzer (*Green Arrow*) and artist Rags Morales (*Hawkman*) craft a shocking event that introduces a new element of danger into the personal lives of DC's most recognizable heroes—with tragic results. "There will be casualties," promises the editor. "And not necessarily at the level that we're used to seeing."

The identities of those casualties remain secret, along with most other plot details. *Identity Crisis* is so guarded, in fact, that only select members of DC's editorial staff have read the story in its entirety. "We don't want to ruin anybody's fun!" explains Carlin. "We want to let people experience all the twists and turns of the story for themselves."

Given Meltzer's background in thriller novels, expect twists and turns aplenty. The author plans to keep readers busy solving a compelling murder mystery while simultaneously trying to uncover a sinister secret that's been haunting certain members of the Justice League for years.

As for which Leaguers will dominate the spotlight? "I'm using the full Justice League as I see the Justice League," insists Meltzer. "Which is Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern and Aquaman—and perhaps most importantly, the next tier of Green Arrow, Hawkman, Atom, Elongated Man, Zatanna, Black Canary."

For Meltzer, the heart of *Identity Crisis* will rest in the story's ability to make readers care about these heroes. "You can have the best plot in the whole world," explains Meltzer, "but if your reader doesn't care about the characters, nobody will care at all. But if you love the characters—if you're worried that they're going to die on you—you're going to turn the pages at Wally West speed. And that's what it really came down to—writing the story that examines the characters at their core."

Believe it or not, DC nearly didn't get the chance to attempt that goal. "The funny part about *Identity Crisis* is that I almost didn't do it!" recalls Meltzer. Carlin had originally approached the scribe about writing an arc of *JLA*, but Meltzer had been too busy at the time. Months later, when DC's VP of Editorial Dan DiDio began sniffing around for a groundbreaking story that could tear down the status quo of the DCU, Carlin turned to Meltzer again.

The scribe had just completed a draft of his new novel, and a return to comics was certainly on his mind. "But at first, I just didn't have the take that I really wanted to do," recalls Meltzer. "I figured it wasn't worth doing if it wasn't something really different and truly special. So I went home and tried to figure out the best story, and after many phone conversations with Mike and Dan, we had this breakthrough, and I said, 'Okay, I got it, I got it, I got it, let me go and work this out!' I came back to them and literally pitched the entire series, with every beat, every twist and every turn, and I said, 'Just tell me if we can do this and get away with it.' Luckily, Dan was in charge, and he said yes!"

Once Meltzer signed on, DC turned its attention to locking up the ideal penciler for the job. Enter Morales, the artist who helped Geoff Johns reinvigorate a certain Winged Warrior.

"Dan was a fan of what I'd been doing with *Hawkman*," explains Morales. "And for *Identity Crisis*, they were looking for an artist who brought a certain sense of emotion to the table. Characterization is a strong point for me—I guess I've been called a good actor on paper—and that's the kind of thing they were looking for, because it's going to be a very emotional storyline."

Both Morales and Meltzer are well aware of the breakout potential of this project. "I've been very lucky," admits Meltzer. "My first project, taking DC's then-No 2 book from Kevin Smith's solid hands, was a gift. And this is another."

As for Morales? "I loved *Hawkman*, and for me to give up that book to do this, it means a lot," says the artist. "I've been in this industry for 15 years, so I know these things don't come every day. And to be told that we're basically reinventing a universe, and that it's going to be looked upon as the next *Watchmen*? What can I say? I'm super-pumped!"

Perhaps even more significantly, *Identity Crisis* has the potential to be a breakout project for DC itself, as the story that proves once and for all that the publisher is not afraid to break down boundaries and take chances with its most established characters. After all, if the story lives up to its billing, the consequences spinning out of *Identity Crisis* will be felt for years to come, with readers never looking at the heroes and villains of the DC Universe the same way again. And the lofty comparisons to *Watchmen* and *Crisis on Infinite Earths* prove just how much confidence DC has in the project.

But Meltzer remains cautiously optimistic. "I make no promises about changing everything, nor do I think everything needs changing," adds Meltzer. "I think the only thing that needs to happen is a good story, told with compelling characters. And you have to admit, DC flat-out has some great toys to play with!"

Just don't expect all those toys to make it back to the box in one piece.

DIDJA KNOW? The name "Identity Crisis" was partially inspired by a video tape of the classic George Reeves "Superman" television series that rests on editor Mike Carlin's office shelf. The name of the episode? You guessed it—"Identity Crisis"! ■ RH

QUITE A STRETCH Elongated Man jumps to the forefront of the JLA emergency in *Identity Crisis*. This is not a typo.

BUZZ BIN

With writer Grant Morrison's *New X-Men* run wrapping up with March's issue #154, a replacement has yet to be named, but Marvel's chasing a number of high-profile scribes to begin working on the title, and while there's little info on who may take over, reportedly one writer got Marvel so jazzed the House of Ideas is working day and night to sign him!

With Greg Rucka's *Wolverine* and Mark Millar's new *Spider-Man* series moving to the Marvel Knights line in April 2004 and kicking off a new era of greatness under Editor Axel Alonso, *Iron Man* may also join the umbrella in 2004 with a bold new direction.

With *Sojourn* coming to an end Top Cow jumped on the acclaimed artistic team of Greg Land, Jay Leisten and Justin Ponsor to tackle another sexy female character. The trio teams up for the cover to *Tomb Raider* #40.

A slew of new Vertigo ongoing titles will launch in 2004, including a relaunch of *Books of Magic* in June featuring scripts by British television writer Si Spencer based on stories by Neil Gaiman. Other upcoming Vertigo ongoings include *Swamp Thing* the first arc of which will feature scripts by Andy Diggle (*The Losers*) and art by Enrique Breccia (*Legion Worlds*), a vampire romp called *Bite Club* by Howard Chaykin (*American Century*) and *Cauldron* by Jonathan Vankin (*Vertigo Pop! Tokyo*) and Len Gallagher.

SWAMP THING

Following up on the success of the comic book adaptation of George R. R. Martin's *The Hedge Knight* Image/Roaring Studios has obtained the license for best-selling author Robert Jordan's series of acclaimed fantasy novels. With a new Jordan-penned novel set to hit shelves in 2004, Roaring Studios plans to release the novel's comic book adaptation.

While the first arc of writer Brian Michael Bendis' new series *The Pulse*—formerly known as the mature reader title *Alias*—will be penciled by *Ultimate Spider-Man* artist Mark Bagley, expect *Alias* artist Michael Gaydos to jump on board the series beginning with its second arc.

Playing on the success of the recent *Spider-Man/Wolverine* mini by Brett Matthews and Vatche Mavian, Marvel is reportedly planning an ongoing monthly series teaming the two top characters.

ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

AQUAMAN

(DC)

Strange things are afoot in Metropolis following the disappearance of Superman (in December's *Superman* #200), as WildStorm's Mr. Majestic arrives in *Action Comics* #811, Part One of the three-part "Strange New Visitor" storyline running through the Superman books in January. Issue #812 kicks off the six-part Michael Turner/Joe Kelly/Talent Caldwell storyarc that runs through the Superman books in February and March and April features the debut of new creative team Chuck Austen (*Avengers*) and Ivan Reis (*Lady Death*). The duo will launch into a 12-issue arc that takes Clark Kent back to his roots as a struggling reporter. "We're going to bust him down to covering local politics on a county level," reveals Austen. "His role will be severally diminished and he won't be happy in his day life, so he looks forward to being Superman and going out and busting heads. We want to make him excited about being Superman." The scribe also plans to pit Supes against some formidable villains. "The first arc is a story about Magog, who shows up in the second issue and injects liquid Kryptonite into Superman's veins. We want to keep him from being just a guy who has the power to handle anything."

(DC)

There's a new sheriff in town—Mr. Majestic's time in Metropolis continues in January's issue #624, and the Turner/Kelly/Caldwell storyline keeps chugging along in issues #625-626. Clark Kent turns crime hound when Greg Rucka and Matt Clark take over the title starting in April. Assigned to the crime beat of the *Daily Planet*, Clark gets his own desk at Police Plaza, where he keeps an eye on crime when he's not in the tights. And early on, a new villain shows up with a unique take on why Superman must be destroyed. "The murderous thing about Superman is that it's very hard to give him a good villain," laughs Rucka. "As [Editor] Eddie Berganza says, that's why almost everybody ends up in a power suit, 'cuz you really don't go toe to toe with him." At the same time, Lois finds herself an embedded reporter in a war zone, and the new Metropolis SCU is introduced with a crazy new lieutenant who wastes no time butting heads with the Man of Steel. For more on the Man of Steel, check out the Top 10 Events on p. 30!

(Marvel)

Gearing up for "Spider-Man 2" isn't the Wall-crawler's only concern this winter. January's *Amazing Spider-Man*'s #503 by writers J. Michael Straczynski and Fiona Avery and artist John Romita Jr. begins a two-part story that follows up on the aftermath of Spidey and Dr. Strange's fight with Dormammu from the historic issue #500. Guest starring Thor's evil brother Loki, the story focuses on a sorceress freed from years of captivity who then sets out to thank Spider-Man, the man responsible for her newfound freedom. After that, JMS will return as the regular solo writer of *Amazing* with a new storyarc.

DIDJA KNOW?

Artist Mike McKone and writer Geoff Johns did a walking tour of San Francisco during a recent convention and snapped photo reference of the city to make sure that McKone's San Fran was as authentic as possible for *Teen Titans*!

(DC)

The Atlantean hero dives into a brand new direction starting in February's issue #15, when the new creative team (and *H-E-R-O* collaborators) of Will Pfeifer and Patrick Gleason swim ashore with the five-part "American Tidal." The first thing on the duo's to-do list? Sink San Diego! The sun-drenched city collapses into the ocean, killing thousands and burying thousands more under tons of rubble. When Aquaman plumbs the depths in search of survivors, he makes a shocking discovery: The survivors can suddenly breathe underwater, but not on land! Which means the aquatic hero is somehow connected to the horrifying tragedy.

(Aspen Entertainment)

See the Top 10 Events on p. 30!

(WildStorm/DC)

The superpowered badasses of the WildStorm Universe kick off the new year with a bang by—well, taking over the world and ruling with an iron fist! February's "Coup D'Etat" event ropes in the entire Eye of the Storm line as the various superpowered denizens of the world react to The Authority's power play. When the regular title resumes with March's #10, Robbie Morrison and Dwayne Turner embark on a final run to the middle of the year, as they give way to the new creative team of Ed Brubaker (*Catwoman*) and an artist to be named later with issue #15 in late summer.

(Marvel)

A new year finds a new hero joining the Avengers. Issues #77 and #78 kick off new writer Chuck Austen (*Uncanny X-Men*) and artist Olivier Coipel's return to *Avengers* with "Lionheart of Avalon," a five-part arc beginning in January. As the Avengers travel to England to stop the Wrecking Crew, a civilian woman picks up Captain America's shield to protect some of the fallen Avengers and dies in the process, which leads to the long-awaited return of Captain Britain. Then a three-issue arc, titled "Once an Invader," features a new take on the World War II heroes, this time led by the U.S. Agent, who's beginning to contact a number of former Invaders including Namor. After that three-issue arc, Austen reveals that a company-wide crossover titled "Atlantean Nation" may begin in *Avengers* #85.

(DC)

The search for Angel Lupo goes on as Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso's gritty "Broken City" arc continues. The Penguin, Scarface and a host of brand new rogues cross paths with the Dark Knight, who begins to lose control and becomes more and more vicious in his dealings with criminals. Batman eventually teams up with the same Gotham underworld he's fought so long to destroy, and it all comes to a shocking conclusion in March's issue #625, leading into the beginning of Judd Winick and Dustin Nguyen's six-issue run. According to Winick, "As the Crow Flies" will be a gangster-heavy arc featuring Scarecrow and another mystery villain, with Alfred and Robin playing key roles. "We dive into all the aspects that circle around

BUZZ BIN

Nothing has been officially confirmed, but rumor has it that the popular *Empire* creative tag team of Mark Waid and Barry Kitson have signed on for another DC project—only this time, the duo will tackle an established DC property. More details to come!

While artist Michael Turner's got work lined up throughout 2004 including a *Superman/Batman* arc with writer Jeph Loeb beginning in March and his own series *Soulfire* beginning in August, Marvel's hot for the superstar artist to take on one of their top-tier characters as soon as his time frees up.

Ed McGuinness's first six-issue arc of *Superman/Batman* may be wrapping up, but the artist is already hard at work cranking out *Superman/Batman* #14, the beginning of the series' third arc (which follows Mike Turner's upcoming arc).

Word on the street is that Judd Winick (*Green Arrow*) is deep into talks with Vertigo to do a sequel to his 2003 vampire mini-series, *Blood & Water*.

Carlos Pacheco has signed a three-year exclusive deal with DC. Besides drawing covers for *JSA*, the artist will be working on an upcoming arc of *Superman/Batman*—most likely the book's fourth arc, following Turner's arc and McGuinness' second arc.

SUPERMAN

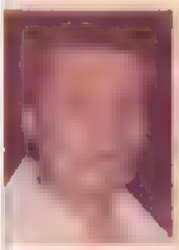
While there's no word on what writer and *Sandman* creator Neil Gaiman will do for Marvel Comics after his series *1602* ends, there's been a ton of speculation about the writer taking on the X-Men or Nick Fury in a limited series.

In fall of 2004 former CrossGen artist Butch Guice will illustrate a graphic novel from Humanoids Publishing called *Olympus* written by *The Possessed* co-writers Geoff Johns and Kris Grimminger about a group of archeology students who find themselves transported to Mt. Olympus...and encounter all the gods and monsters that come with it! Check out **www.wizarduniverse.com** for a first look at Guice's artwork!

The *Amazing Spider-Man* artist is rumored to be working on his first creator owned project for a major publisher—it will be his first work ever outside of Marvel!

ONES TO WATCH

LEE BERMEJO



With a resume that includes *Superman/Gen*[F], *Batman/Deathblow* and *Global Frequency*, the young WildStorm artist—a studio mate of Jim Lee—has won fans over with his stylized realism and expert use of shadows. But it's his take on the Man of Steel that promises to land him among today's hottest artists.

Bermejo's career gets a super-sized boost with the Brian Azzarello-penned *Lex Luthor: Man of Steel*. And the artist plans to use the mini-series to put a new spin on two of the most iconic characters in the DCU. "Since Lex is the main character, we're trying really hard to make him more relatable and sympathetic," explains Bermejo. "Artistically, I'm definitely treating him as a suave guy, and thinner."

As for Superman? "I'm making his costume look like it's made of a slicker, shinier material, and the emblem on his chest will look more like a shield," reveals Bermejo. "His facial expressions will look much more intense. I'm treating him like a time bomb—you never want to get too close. Brian always says he's one bad day away from being the worst threat the world has ever seen, and I'm trying to latch onto that visually."

And if you're looking for a monthly fix, Bermejo's art will grace *Gotham Knights* covers starting with February's issue #50!

During his college years, Bermejo worked at a Haagen Dazs in Montecedo, Calif., where he was yelled at by Dennis Miller. "He got really pissed off at me for not remembering his order," laughs the artist. "Dennis always ordered the same thing. I had just started, so I didn't know what he wanted, and he got upset. He was kind of an a--hole!" ■ RICHARD HO

CAPTAIN AMERICA

COMMON GROUNDS

Scarecrow—fear, and the terrors that motivate us," says Winick. "In the end, we'll have major changes in a few of the characters and introduce a new bad guy into the DCU."

(DC)

Black Canary knows kung fu. Or at least she'll learn when the "Sensei and Student" arc continues in January's issue #63, courtesy of Gail Simone and Ed Benes. Dinah runs up against unlikely teachers Cheshire and Lady Shiva in China, and some dangerous alliances are formed. "Consider it a drive-in movie with a double bill showing of a martial arts epic and prison saga, all in one story," teases Simone. "I strongly suggest people eat popcorn and drink huge sodas while reading." Meanwhile, Oracle opens up some of her darkest secrets to new teammate Huntress in order to combat a powerful new enemy, and Simone introduces readers to the Golden Age Birds of Prey! "The do-or-die ending of this arc is something DC readers are going to be talking about, we're quite certain," promises the scribe. And for more on the Birds, check out "Book of the Month" on **p. 128**!

(Marvel Knights)

If you like HBO's political drama "K Street," *Captain America* may be the next book on your pull list. *Captain America* #22—the second part of the five-part "Homeland" storyarc by new writer Robert Morales (*Truth*) and artist Chris Bachalo (*New X-Men*)—sees Cap travel to Guantanamo Bay to serve on the tribunal of an Arab-American accused of conspiring with terrorists. Guest-starring both Nick Fury and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, the story will lead Cap into a global conspiracy before May's issue #27, which begins the "Campaign" storyline that builds on the first arc's introduction of a political figure that Cap respects, who gives the Avenger a renewed belief in the American political process.

(DC)

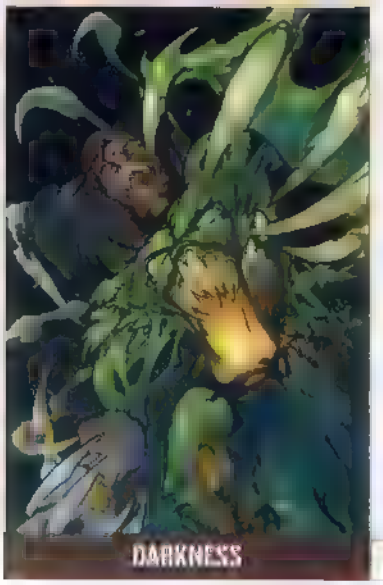
Selina gets into the catfight of her life as writer Ed Brubaker and artists Paul Gulacy and Jimmy Palmiotti put the feline fatale through the ringer. "Early in 2004, Catwoman gets into the bloodiest all-out brawl of my entire run," reveals Brubaker. "She goes in swinging to a fight she's fairly sure she can't win. Whether she does in fact win is not a sure thing. I mean it. She could lose. It's not like Batman, where you absolutely know he's going to win at the end. You never know what could happen in this book, and I'm going to spend a lot of time reminding fans of that this year." The battle will culminate in June's issue #32, where Brubaker promises to bring many new secrets about his leading lady to light.

(Top Cow)

Troy Hickman's critically acclaimed self-published hit *Holey Crullers* gets the revamp treat

DIDJA KNOW?

El Cazador ("The Hunter"), namesake for the CrossGen comic, was a real Spanish ship that was loaded with riches when it disappeared in 1784. Jump ahead to Aug. 2, 1993 when Captain Jerry Murphy accidentally discovered it during a commercial fishing trip. His boat? *The Mistake*!



ment in January, courtesy of Top Cow. The six-issue series revolves around the idea that superheroes are people too—with real problems and real concerns revealed in the course of conversations at a chain of donut shops catering to the super-powered crowd. Each issue sports two stories based on Hickman's witty original scripts, with brand-spankin' new art by Dan Jurgens (*Thor*) and a bevy of other fan favorite pros. Issue #1 finds the Speeding Bullet confessing the downsides of being the fastest man alive to a sympathetic reporter, while the back-up by Michael Avon Oeming (*Powers*) tells the tale of two arch-nemeses who work out their differences in the Common Grounds' mens' room.

(Dark Horse)

See Top 10 Events on p. 24!

(WildStorm/DC)

The world learns to respect the Authority's authority in February, when the WildStorm Universe's most radical superteam takes over the world in a four-part weekly event that replaces *The Authority*, *Stormwatch*, *Team Achilles* and *Wildcats Version 3.0* for the month. Says WildStorm founder Jim Lee (who provides pencils for Book One of the crossover), "This event basically brings all the characters and teams of the Eye of the Storm Universe into opposition with one another. Who's for the status quo, and who's for change?" Whether the Authority retains their grasp on world domination remains to be seen, but the backlash from their coup is sure to have consequences for each of the titles moving forward.

(Marvel Knights)

Hell's Kitchen ain't what it used to be. Picking up after the events of *Daredevil* #50 writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Alex Maleev return to *DD* with January's issue #56, which continues DD's new role as the Kingpin of Hell's Kitchen after the hero dispatched crimelord Wilson Fisk and took the reins of his borough last year in the five-issue arc. "There's one thing about [Daredevil's] personality that we've never addressed, and when we do, there will be life-altering changes," describes Bendis. After that, the Black Widow returns in issue #62 as DD's on-again, off-again partner. "I love the idea of Black Widow and Daredevil going out, fighting crime and then getting it on," explains Bendis of the five-part arc.

(Top Cow)

When writer Paul Jenkins and artist Dale Keown finish their run with February's issue #7, a new cast of writers takes over for rotating storyarcs with artist Martin Montiel. Steve Niles (*Dark Days*), Frank Tieri (*Weapon X*) and Ron Marz (*The Path*) will have their shots at mafia hitman and current bearer of The Darkness Jackie Estacado for respective three-issue storyarcs, with a possible three-parter by David Lapham (*Stray Bullets*) to round out the year.

(CrossGen)

If you missed the pirate boat, catch up with January's collected edition reprinting issues

ESCAPE CLAUSE

The Escapist, the literary creation of Michael Chabon in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, comes to comics in the 2004 Dark Horse quarterly anthology, *The Amazing Adventures of The Escapist*. But how does the Master of Elusion stack up against the greatest magician of our time, David Blaine? Let's take a look!

Supermodel Josie Maran — Super-crazy a-hole dictator Adolf Hitler

Blaine

Being frozen alive in Times Square — Winning the Pulitzer Prize

Escapist

Harry Houdini — Mr. Miracle

Blaine

Picking up chicks — Picking locks

Escapist

The English — Iron Chain

Escapist

Being buried alive — Being tied up

Escapist

Fiona Apple (dated her, too!) — Glenn Miller

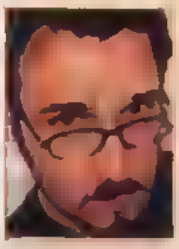
Blaine

THE VERDICT

Literary awards put the Escapist on top in a 4-3 squeaker, but Blaine gets props for being a stud *and* making both Doug Henning and David Copperfield disappear!

ONES TO WATCH

ED BRUBAKER



Known for concocting crime stories that blend Raymond Chandler's noir storytelling with the gritty realism of TV's "Homicide: Life on the Street," Brubaker won loads of critical acclaim in 2003 for his work on *Detective Comics*, *Catwoman*, *Gotham Central* and his WildStorm creation *Sleeper*.

Few writers win as much praise from critics and fans as Brubaker, yet still face such low sales numbers. This year, Brubaker may be on the way to having the high sales to go along with his outstanding comics beginning with a February-shipping issue of WildStorm's *Coup D'Etat* to be drawn by Jim Lee and featuring the cast of *Sleeper*. The issue will be a taste of what's to come in Brubaker's upcoming run on *The Authority* this summer. "I've got big, big plans to take the group in directions they've never gone before," teases Brubaker. "I'm really looking forward to my first crack at a big superteam book."

In addition to tackling this high-profile superhero project, the scribe will continue to pen his noir crime thrillers *Gotham Central*, which he co-writes with fellow crime-maven Greg Rucka, as well as *Catwoman* and *Sleeper: Season 2* kicking off mid-year.

Brubaker's outstanding work on *Catwoman* and *Sleeper* more than qualifies him to write *Authority*, but there was a time when the writer had to fib to get a job.

"I moved to San Francisco in '89 and lied and said I knew the city really well to get a delivery job," confesses Brubaker, who has worked everywhere from warehouses to comic shops and anywhere else he could get a lot of thinking done. "The best way to get to know that city was to be forced to drive around it every day for six hours." ■ RH

FABLES

THE FLASH

#1-#3 of the hit series. In February's issue #6, writer Chuck Dixon and artist Steve Epting introduce the mysterious Serpenthead Cay, a fabled treasure island somehow connected to malicious Blackjack Tom. Meanwhile, Privateer Redhand Harry continues to track El Cazador and Captain Sin, with designs to send them both to the bottom of the sea!

(Dark Horse)
The second issue of the 80-page quarterly series adapted from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* hits in March, with stories and art from novelist Glen David Gold, Gene Colan (*Tomb of Dracula*) and Scott Morse (*Elektra: Glimpse and Echo*).

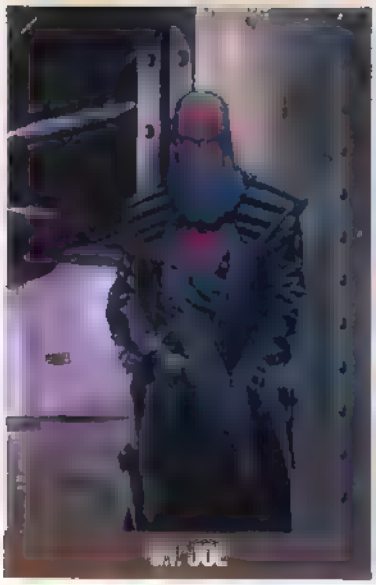
(DC/Vertigo)
After some two-fisted tales of barroom antics in January's issue #21, writer Bill Willingham and artist Mark Buckingham send Red Riding Hood racing out of the homelands and into Fabletown—but not without some wicked company on her tail. Meanwhile, Prince Charming runs for mayor of Fabletown so he can pilfer the freshly murdered Bluebeard's loot. "Finally, as promised long ago," teases Willingham, "by April's issue #24 those readers truly on the ball will know who the Adversary is."

(Marvel)
Mark Waid and Mike Wieringo are here to stay, and January's issue #509 kicks off a fantastic new era with the three-part "Hereafter" storyline, which wraps up loose ends from the "Unthinkable" arc. Death will play a big role in the latest adventure of the Fantastic Three (that's right, we said "Three"!), and Waid promises a finale to remember. "To say that the FF will be reunited with someone from their past would be a vast, vast understatement," teases the scribe. "When people see what I'm talking about, they'll just fall down dead!" On top of that, Reed will do some damage control to repair the FF's public image following the events of "Authoritative Action." "In the next arc, the task will be to find some way to re-earn New York and the world's faith in the Fantastic Four," says Waid. "They're now fallen celebrities, like Ben and J. Lo after 'Gigli' [*laughs*], and they've got to find some way of putting their star back on the map." And look for a certain Wall-crawler to possibly make a guest appearance. "The arc might just guest-star Spider-Man, because Wieringo draws an amazing Spider-Man—no pun intended," laughs Waid.

(Aspen Entertainment)
See Top 10 Events on p. 30!

DIDJA KNOW?

Gail Simone is the queen of makeovers—and not just for comics! When she's not revitalizing books like *Birds of Prey*, she's busy fulfilling customers' beauty needs in her very own salon in Oregon.



(DC)

Wally West flashes back onto the scene in February's issue #207 as former *JLA* artist Howard Porter debuts as regular penciler. Look for guest appearances by Kid Flash, the JLA, Nightwing and others during the first few months of Flash's return, as Keystone City celebrates their hero's homecoming. "Of course, all this does is get the Rogues' attention," points out series scribe Geoff Johns. "And if a street full of Rogues isn't enough for the Flash to deal with, the JLA come looking for answers to where the Flash has been these last few months—and when the Flash doesn't give them, it's up to Superman to out-run the Flash for a little heart-to-heart." Not only that, but Johns plans to accomplish one goal for the first five issues: "To have, at the very least, cameos by every Flash villain." And Nightwing will stop by in issue #210 to help Wally figure out why the heck he has so many darn enemies.

(Devil's Due)

This March, the creative duo behind February's *G.I. Joe: Reborn* one-shot, writer John Ney Rieber (*Captain America*) and artist Eddie Barrows (*G.I. Joe: Frontline*) will fire up a brand new ongoing Joe book spawned from their one-shot and January's *Cobra: Reborn*—from writer Paul Jenkins (*Spectacular Spider-Man*) and artist Joe Bennett (*The Crew*)—that will be an Ultimate-style revamp called *G.I. Joe: Reloaded* **(see sidebar at right)**! The regular *Joe* series will kick off January's issue #26 with a new creative team, writer Brandon Jerwa and artist Tim Seeley, and a new storyarc that opens a world of secrets. Check out *Toyfare* #79 on sale Jan. 14 for an original *Reloaded* six-page story!

(DC)

Still bearing the emotional and physical scars of the "Straight Shooter" storyline, Ollie teams up with Black Canary to investigate a rash of robberies in Star City in the five-part "City Walls" arc that kicks off with January's issue #34. "Ollie has his heart and hands full dealing with the ramifications of all that happened, and he has to come to terms with the guilt for the injuries and deaths that he feels are on his head," reveals series scribe Judd Winick (Phil Hester continues as penciler). "And then he has to come up against a familiar DCU costumed villain coming to town and causing trouble." In the following arc, a new crimelord takes over Star City's underworld and gives Ollie yet another threat to deal with, leading to a controversial conclusion that introduces a new costumed vigilante to the streets.

(DC)

Kyle Rayner's undercover mission to destroy the Black Circle Syndicate in the five-part "Wanted" storyarc uncovers the true power behind the interplanetary crime organization—the Weaponers of Qward! Now it's Green Lantern vs. the Weaponers in a battle to prevent an all-out Qwardian invasion, culminating in the double-sized anniversary finale in March's issue #175, in which Kyle just might have to make a life-or-death decision that will impact the future of the Green Lantern legacy forever. And it all leads to the return

REVAMP TO WATCH

G.I. JOE: RELOADED

Devil's Due isn't just reloading G.I. Joe—they're sawing off the barrel and jamming it with high caliber shells for an explosive new relaunch.

This March, hot on the heels of the *Cobra: Reborn* and *G.I. Joe: Reborn* one-shots in January and February respectively, *G.I. Joe: Reloaded* is going to take the comic racks by storm. The brand new ongoing series, which features writer John Ney Rieber (*Captain America*) and *G.I. Joe: Frontline* artist Eddie Barrows, gives an "Ultimized" look at the G.I. Joe characters and their world.

"*Reloaded* is meant not only to push that envelope toward the realities of threat and combat," explains Rieber of the new, more intense and realistic series, "but to push it all the way into the real and rip it wide open."

The traditional Joe stories will continue to be told in the regular ongoing *G.I. Joe* series written by Brandon Jerwa (*G.I. Joe: Frontline*) and penciled by regular *Joe* artist Tim Seeley, but *Reloaded* provides an opportunity to tell edgier stories that are more removed from any fantastical elements in the comic's established continuity and are instead more grounded in the world around us.

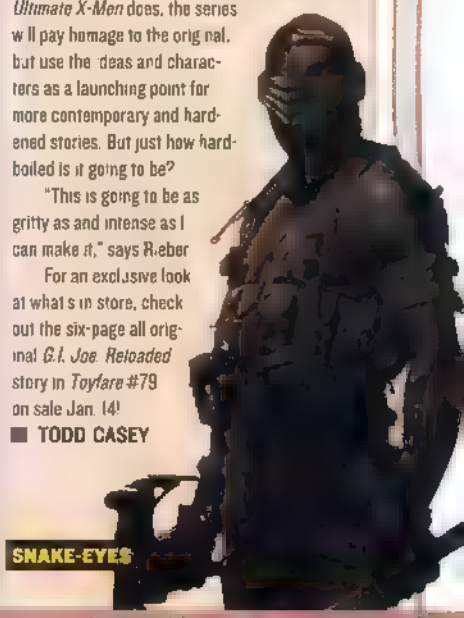
"*Reloaded* strips the classic team down to a core cast and brings those classic characters into our time," reveals Rieber, adding that the favorites like Hawk, Snake-Eyes, Storm Shadow and Cobra Commander will all still be part of the book. "The spirits of the characters remain true to their originals—but we're going in deeper. We're connecting them to the era we live in—and the threats that shape it and shape us."

Much in the way *Ultimate Spider-Man* or *Ultimate X-Men* does, the series will pay homage to the original, but use the ideas and characters as a launching point for more contemporary and hardened stories. But just how hard-boiled is it going to be?

"This is going to be as gritty as and intense as I can make it," says Rieber.

For an exclusive look at what's in store, check out the six-page all original *G.I. Joe: Reloaded* story in *Toyfare* #79 on sale Jan. 14!

■ **TODD CASEY**



SNAKE-EYES

ONES TO WATCH

DARWYN COOKE

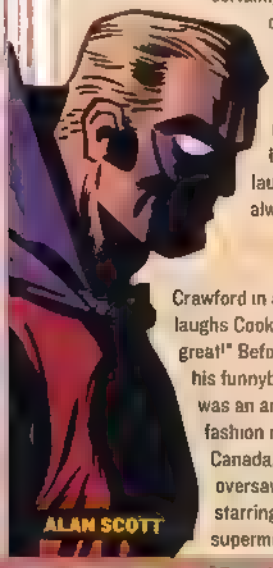
With a striking style that evokes the simplistic lines of Mike Allred and the animated expressiveness of Bruce Timm, the Canadian creator has established himself as the next artists' artist—a do-it-all guy who writes as well as he draws. After spending time as a storyboard artist on the "Batman/Superman Adventures" animated series—and designing the title sequence for "Batman Beyond"—Cooke landed firmly on the comics map with his critically acclaimed graphic novel *Selina's Big Score*, winner of *Wizard*'s Best Graphic Novel of 2002

Cooke's poised for a breakout year in 2004, starting with the highly anticipated *DC: New Frontier* six-issue mini-series set to debut in January The creator poured nearly two years into the writing and drawing of his DC opus, which promises to return the DCU's greatest heroes to the luster of their Silver Age roots.

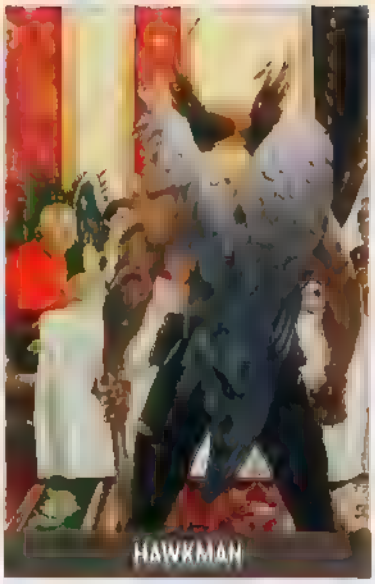
Following that, Cooke has several projects in various stages of development including some very big plans with Marvel. "I can't really talk about it just yet," teases the creator, "but it's really innovative and large scale, and it's a very safe bet that it's going to be my focus after *New Frontier*"

But fret not, DC fans—*New Frontier* certainly won't be the last of Cooke's projects for the publisher. "When it comes down to it, I'm more of a DC boy at heart," laughs Cooke. "So I'll always work for DC."

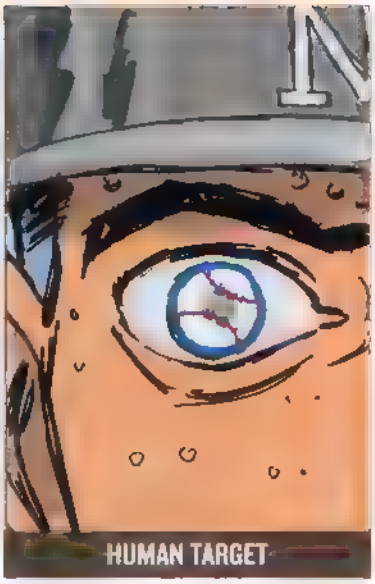
"I saw Cindy Crawford in a brassiere," laughs Cooke. "And it was great!" Before embarking on his funnybook career, Cooke was an art director for a fashion magazine in Canada, where he oversaw a photo shoot starring the stunning supermodel ■ RH



ALAN SCOTT



HAWKMAN



HUMAN TARGET

of former *GL* writer Ron Marz for a six-issue stint beginning with April's issue #176!

(DC)

The winged warrior teams up with the JSA and heads to Kahndaq, the homeland of Black Adam, to save the people from a hostile takeover in a six-issue weekly crossover entitled "Black Reign" The event kicks off with January's *JSA* #56 and continues the following week in *Hawkman* #23 As the story alternates between the two titles, the heroes attempt to free Atom Smasher, Northwynd, Brainwave and others from Black Adam's grip—but a traitor will spark a war between the two sides. It all leads up to February's *Hawkman* #25, which marks the final issue for the creative team of Geoff Johns, penciler Rags Morales and inker Michael Bair Their defection makes room for a four-part storyline by *Monolith* co-writers Jimmy Palmiotti and Justin Gray and artist Ryan Sook (*Arkham Asylum*).

(Dark Horse)

April will be the biggest month in Hellboy history when the feature film hits theaters on April 2, and Dark Horse promises to keep that momentum going in the comics with a host of hellish releases, including: a new *B.P.R.D.* ongoing series of mini-series written by Mike Mignola with art by Guy Davis in March, a new, original Hellboy tale in *The Dark Horse Book of Witchcraft* hardcover that hits in May; and a brand new original Hellboy story for Free Comic Book Day in July! Fans of the film should also be sure to check out the 200-page *Art of the Hellboy Movie* book that gives an inside look at the making of the movie complete with candid interviews, photos and behind-the-scenes art from Mignola himself!

(DC/Vertigo)

After barely surviving a run-in with a psychotic gunman in a Boston church in January's issue #6, Christopher Chance heads to middle America for the three-part "Where the Wind Blows" arc from writer Peter Milligan and artist Cliff Chiang, who alternates arcs with Javier Pulido. Chance finds himself entangled with an ex-member of a splinter-cell of the radical 1970s activist group called the Weathermen—and sunny skies ain't in the forecast!

(DC)

The second-string Leaguers continue to split sides in March with the debut of the six-issue follow-up to the smash hit *Formerly Known as the Justice League*. The creative team of Keith Giffen, J M DeMatteis and Kevin Maguire return for the bi-

DIDJA KNOW?

With Marvel's Epic line dead, the House of Ideas will now publish the imprint's remaining stories in a quarterly anthology, which has led at least one of the line's titles, *Phantom Jack*, to move to Image.

INCREDIBLE HULK

JLA

weekly mini-series, which will find the same Leaguers (for the most part) from the first series—but with one very key addition. "Guy Gardner comes back," reveals Giffen. "We send [the League] to hell, and then on the way out of hell, they make a wrong turn and wind up in DC's version of the Ultimate Universe where Max Millar is running the 'Ultimate Super Buddies' out of a Times Square peep show." The addition of the surly Gardner is sure to rile things up, but the craziest high jinks may come from the most unexpected place. "If you think we're treating Mary Marvel too nice," Giffen teases, "wait until you see her Ultimate doppelganger!"

(Marvel)

January features two issues of *Incredible Hulk*— the first, issue #65 by writer Bruce Jones and artist Mike Deodato, wraps up the final chapter of the "Split Decision" storyline before issue #66—by Jones and fill-in artist Doug Braithwaite (*Universe X*)—exposes the ultimate plans of Mr Blue (the still-alive Betty Banner), who's been secretly helping Bruce Banner evade the mysterious organization that's been pursuing the Hulk's blood. As "Dead Like Me" continues in February's issue #67, more secrets are revealed as Banner's best friend, Doc Samson and Banner's former wife Betty grow increasingly closer. "A lot of the weird science that's revealed at the end of 'Split Decision' comes to fruition in 'Dead Like Me,'" says *Hulk* Editor Axel Alonso, "but we don't want to give away too much."

(DC)

Black Adam's conquest of Kahndaq pits him and his recruits against the combined might of the JSA and Hawkman in the six-part weekly crossover event "Black Reign," which starts with January's *JSA* #56 by Geoff Johns and Don Kramer. Following the conclusion of this arc, the classic JSA adversary Degaton will show up in *JSA* #59. "Think of him as the Red Skull crossed with Kang," says writer Geoff Johns. "He's a disturbing individual who's going to ruffle some feathers." Next up, the Spectre shows up to play a major role in a storyline that promises to change the nature of the Spirit of Redemption.

(DC)

The League gives the shapeshifting alien visitor introduced in Part One of Dennis O'Neil and Tan Eng Huat's three-part "Extinction" storyarc a tour of the Earth in January's issue #92. The heroes discover that the alien has a dark side, which leads to a pulse-pounding final confrontation in issue #93! Following the conclusion to "Extinction," John Byrne and Chris Claremont embark on their historic six-issue reunion with a six-issue arc titled "The Tenth Circle" [see **p. 26** of the Top Ten Events of 2004 for the lowdown]! And it all leads to the landmark issue #100, which marks the final issue for longtime series writer Joe Kelly.

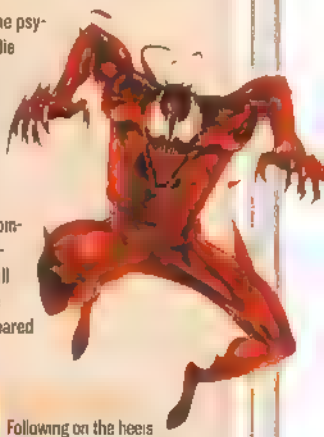
(CrossGen)

This January, writer Tony Bedard and artist Mike Perkins unveil Sir Charles Basildon: He's the world's deadliest espionage agent—but he's not a real person! The identity of Basildon is passed on from one agent to another and Stephanie Shelley is next in line. The most

CHARACTERS TO WATCH

You know the Wolverines and the Supermen get al the attention, but there are other characters who will be getting the spotlight as 2004 rolls along Here are five cand dates worth keeping an eye on!

Springtime will be fright time when the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense, including fishman Abe Sapien and fire-wielding Liz Sherman (above), make their silver screen debut in "Hellboy" on April 2! And look for more of the entire B.P.R.D. when Hellboy's supporting cast get their own series of ongoing minis starting later this year, courtesy of Dark Horse



The psychotic Spider-baddie (right) makes his Ultimate debut in *Ultimate Spider-Man* #50, and in yet another twist, writer Brian Michael Bendis promises that the bloodthirsty symbiote will take over someone who's already appeared in the series!

Following on the heels of Green Arrow, Hawkman and Aquaman, the Nuclear Man gets the patented DC revamp treatment later this year when Dan Jolley (*JSA: The Unholy Three*) and ChrisCross (*Captain Marvel*) ignite a chain reaction with a brand new character becoming the "fission" nightmare. Jim Lee's even redesigning the new Firestorm threads!

The ragin' reptile gets a makeover in March's *Spectacular Spider-Man* #11 courtesy of Paul Jenkins and incoming artist Damion Scott (*Batgirl*), and with rumors that the murderous Dr Curt Connors may be playing a bigger part in July's "Spider-Man 2," we're guessing the Lizard could be the next big baddie in the Spider-universe.

Don't scoff! The muck-encrusted man-monster hits the big screen in August in a film that's being set up like a "Jeepers Creepers"-style horror franchise, with Manny becoming an urban legend that terrifies local teens. Scary flicks made a lot of noise in 2003, and expect the fright-fest to continue with "Man-Thing," which boasts at least one element that'll pack the fanboys into local cineplexes—nudity! ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

ONES TO WATCH

TERRY DODSON

The artist turned heads with his action-packed panels and one hell of a hot Black Cat in Kevin Smith's *Spider-Man/Black Cat: The Evil Men Do*. He also penciled the best looking May Parker (granted it wasn't the withered septuagenarian of current continuity) we've ever seen in Mark Millar's controversial Epic title *Trouble*.

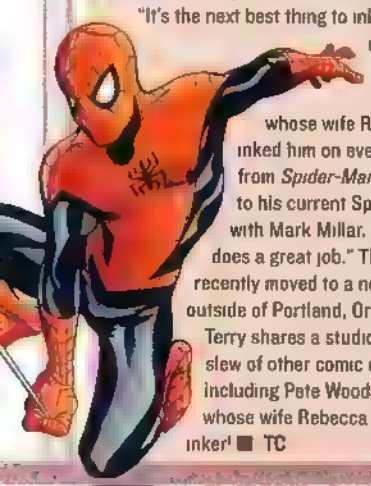
Following a successful collaboration with the Scottish scribe on *Trouble*, Dodson will re-team with Millar for the 12-issue Marvel Knights *Spider-Man*, a project that will afford him the opportunity to render a wide array of the web-slinger's rogues in all their evil glory.

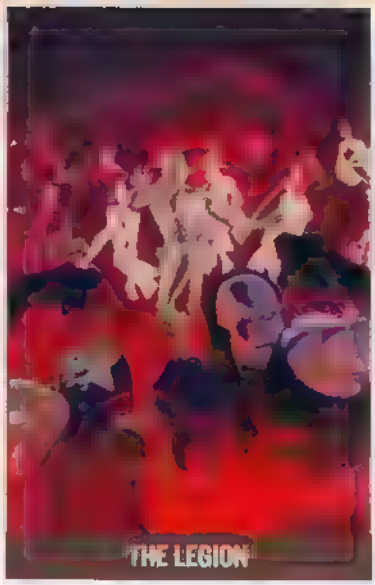
"The first one is Green Goblin," reveals Dodson, "I'm taking a cue from Humberto Ramos' design and running with it—I'm having a blast!"

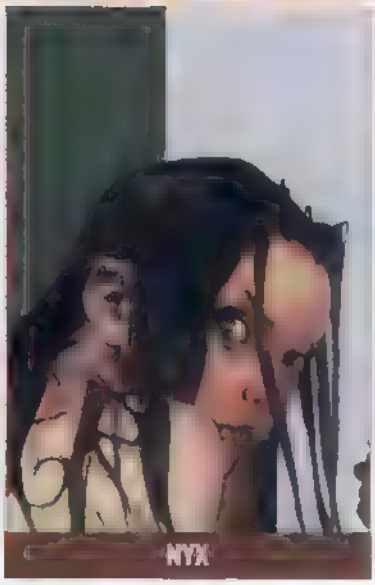
In addition to the villain-packed Spidey project, Dodson will also be penciling an as-yet-untitled book for Humanoids Publishing. "As far as content," he describes, "This is 180 degrees from everything else I've done. It's full of Victorian/Belle Époque era clothing, architecture meets Jules Verne steampunk." With skills diverse enough to do everything from a sexy Black Cat, to an action-packed Spidey smackdown, to a Victorian period piece, it's easy to get ensnared in Dodson's web of spectacular artwork.

It's important for an artist to get along with his inker—but Terry Dodson is married to his!

"It's the next best thing to inking myself," says the artist, whose wife Rachel has inked him on everything from *Spider-Man/Black Cat* to his current Spidey-run with Mark Millar. "I think she does a great job." The artists recently moved to a new home outside of Portland, Ore. where Terry shares a studio with a slew of other comic creators, including Pete Woods (*Robin*), whose wife Rebecca is also his inker! ■ TC







unstoppable (and sexiest) Basildon ever teaches her the ropes so she can uncover the secrets of the mysterious crime cartel "AXIS." In February's #2, Stephanie searches for the mysterious "Lazarus Bale" while continuing the battle to keep Basildon out of her pants.

(DC)

The only thing worse than Darkseid? *Two* Darkseids duking it out—with the fabric of time itself collapsing around them! The historic "Foundations" storyarc concludes with January's issue #30, as entire periods of time are wiped out in the tumult of the Darkseids' battle. Afterwards, Keith Giffen (*Formerly Known as Justice League*) returns to his former team's art duties and Superboy gets his first tour of Legion World in February's issue #31. Dan Abnett, Andy Lanning and Chris Batista then complete their run with two issues that tie up all loose ends remaining from the "Legion Lost" storyline. Classic Legion artist Steve Lightle fills in for one issue before Gail Simone and John Byrne kick off a four-issue bi-weekly arc in June's issue #35.

(DC/Vertigo)

This ragtag collection of spooks can't win for losing; even their vacation time gets shot to hell! The two-part "Downtime" storyarc wraps in January's issue #8 and after a little R&R, writer Andy Diggle and artist Jock ship the Losers off for their next big operation in the five-part "Island Life" arc. Hot lead won't be the only thing cooking the rogue team's collective goose on their latest mission when their island expedition lands them at the site of an active volcano!

(DC)

Jimmy Palmiotti, Justin Gray and Phil Winslade unearth a true monster from the depths of New York in this new ongoing series, which debuts in February. The first arc reveals the magical origin of the title character, a rampaging creature designed to protect the citizens of Manhattan's Lower East Side from criminals that prowl the streets. First conjured in the 1930s, the Monolith was encaged in a tunnel beneath Brooklyn and released 70 years later by a tough street kid named Alice, who takes the monster under her wing while running from monsters all her own.

(Marvel)

See Brian K. Vaughan feature on p. 96!

(DC)

The new year promises to get off to a hellish start for Bludhaven's resident hero. Dick Grayson's life will be rocked by a series of cataclysmic events in the first half of 2004, all

DIDJA KNOW?

Darwyn Cooke's original take on Wonder Woman in *New Frontier* was so Amazonian (think Xena, Warrior Princess, times two!) that DC asked Cooke to tone her down a bit by dropping 20 pounds!

courtesy of Roland Desmond, a.k.a. Blockbuster. The crimelord blames Nightwing for the death of his mother and recruits goons like Shrike, Lady Vic, Firefly, Brutale and the Trigger Twins as part of a diabolical plan to bring the hero down. And if you think Blockbuster's bloody schemes are shocking, just wait 'til you see what Nightwing does in the name of revenge!

(Marvel)

Joe Quesada may be known for turning Marvel around and being one of the top artists in the comics community, but fans might want to add well-respected writer to that list. January's issue #4 of *NYX* by the triple-threat Quesada and artist Joshua Middleton continues the story of disenfranchised teenage mutants on the streets of New York. As the cast begins to fill out with the addition of X-23, a young woman with striking similarities to Wolverine, it'll be revealed in the second half of the six-issue arc that there's been a mysterious (and possibly nefarious) villain behind the events that brought the mutants together. After March's *NYX* #6—the final issue of the first arc—Quesada says he isn't sure if the series will continue, but the EIC is hopeful and plans to either write or co-write an additional arc if fans demand it.

(DC/Vertigo)

With "Bats" currently roosting in their collective belfries, writer Brian Azzarello and artist Eduardo Risso take their noir crime thriller bimonthly leading up to April's big issue #50. The three-part "In Stinked" arc wraps in February's issue #49 when a crew of Philadelphia mobsters turn Jungle Garvey's Wild Animal Park into their own big game hunt—but once Jack the Junkie realizes what's up, he and his 100 untraceable bullets make sure the animals aren't the only beasts getting plugged full of lead.

(DC)

Brother Blood certainly got the Outsiders' blood flowing in time for Judd Winick and Tom Raney to launch a new arc with January's issue #8, which finds the team going up against an old Captain Marvel villain named Sabbac. And with Arsenal recovering from gunshot wounds to the chest, the team gets a new recruit to sub in while Roy recovers. Of course, Nightwing has a small problem with the new recruit: She's former flame and current Bird of Prey, the Huntress! Meanwhile, Thunder's dad, Black Lightning, shows up to keep his daughter out of trouble. "Then, we dive into two stories—one involving the return of a legendary team of Teen Titans villains, and another arc involving a child slavery ring," reveals Winick. "And I must say in all modesty, it will have people talking both in the comics community and the mainstream media!"

(DC)

Kyle Baker keeps rolling out the brand new adventures of Plastic Man in January's issue #2, which finds the stretchable hero getting a new partner in the form of a gorgeous FBI agent who's not too impressed by Plas' boyish charm. Meanwhile, Plastic Man's old partner, Woozy Winks, doesn't take too kindly to being replaced and decides to go the solo crimefighting route. The opening arc will continue to bring Plastic Man's past and pres-

STRANGE ADVICE

Dr. Strange, Master of Mystic Arts...and medical advice columnist? With a possible new series in 2004 courtesy of J. Michael Straczynski (*Amazing Spider-Man*), the good Doctor dispenses slightly more unconventional medical advice until his comic career heats up again.

By the Warp of the Woven Worlds! Here in my East Village abode, my manservant Wong and I are safe from such carnal perils, so I've not encountered such a hideous curse. However, after looking deep within the pages of the Greater Book of the Vishanti, I've uncovered an ancient charm to combat the harlot's hex. You must protect yourself with a sleeve hewn from the skin of Rintrah, the Revenger from R'Vaal, during future encounters with such a witch.

Stress can be an absolute killer on the aura. To eliminate that particular demon, I don the wond'rous Cloak of Levitation for a little "pick me up." Inhale the fumes of a special "herbal" concoction that Wong acquires in Bangkok and meditate in my Sanctum Sanctorum until the moon runs red with blood. Do all of the following, and you too can shed the Wings of Needless Sorrow.

Such an enchantment is the way of those who've not tread upon the astral plane, but for the Sorcerer Supreme, such carnival tricks will not do! Only by casting the Rays of Ra into the heart of their realm through the Decanter of D'Rexarr can you best the malicious hoodoo.

By the Hoary Hosts of Hoggoth! I must call upon the Flames of the Faltine to exorcise the foul trolls blocking safe passage through his duodenum. Countering such witchery requires a goblin's weight of Ex-lax and a hectare of frankincense to combat the repugnant odor that will follow. ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

ONES TO WATCH

RAGS MORALES

Between his fantastic splash pages brimming with action and his expressive, emotive close-ups and personal moments, it's safe to say Rags Morales can handle any type of project he tackles. In the last few years, Morales has honed his work on *Hawkman* and *JSA* fill-ins to the point where there's no type of story with which he can't wow readers.

Morales takes all those years of realistic superheroes and puts them into the most serious situations possible when he joins writer Brad Meltzer for *Identity Crisis*, a seven-issue mini-series from DC hitting in June about a murder that rocks every hero in the DCU and that's already drawing comparisons to some of DC's biggest, most critically acclaimed hits, such as *Watchmen* and *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

"I can't say much about the plot, because we're sworn to secrecy," notes Morales. "But this is my coming out party. That's what it boils down to for me. I've had some success on various titles, but this is one where people are expecting something great, where before they were hoping something good would happen. Will this be my *Killing Joke*, my *Watchmen*? That's not for me to say, that's decided by the fans. I've had growing pains, but right now, I'm at the peak of my game. I'm comfortable with my art, and the timing was right for a big project."

In 1985, Morales—then a 17-year-old high school senior—entered the New York Mets' Banner Day competition. After a two-and-a-half-hour session, which was judged by New York sports columnist Bill Gallo and Mets executives, Morales took home the grand prize, which included a new color TV, VCR, tickets to a future Mets game and autographed baseballs from Dwight Gooden and Keith Hernandez! ■ ANDY SELWIN

SLEEPER

SOJOURN

ent together in unexpected ways, as flashbacks reveal more of his early criminal career as Eel O'Brian. And things get complicated when Eel is suddenly charged with murder, meaning Plas will have to bring himself to justice!

(Marvel/MAX)

Writer Garth Ennis stops pulling his punches and cuts loose when Punisher makes the leap to Marvel's mature reader MAX line, starting in January when issues #1-#2 both ship. Along with new artist Lewis Larosa, Ennis takes Frank Castle back to his bloody roots with the tragedy that started it all—the murder of Castle's family! The Punisher's wife and son are massacred all over again in the six-part arc titled "In the Beginning." With the freedom that the mature readers imprint allows, Ennis promises to propel the Punisher to darker, more violent places than he's ever laid waste to before!

(DC)

A new writer means a new direction for the Dark Knight's teen protégé. Writer Bill Willingham (who made his debut in December's issue #121) introduces Robin to Johnny Warlock, a vile new scumbag who figures to be Tim's arch-nemesis for years to come. The confrontation with Warlock leads Tim to question whether he's cut out to be Robin at all, and someone shows up looking to take his place. And that ain't all. "Tim goes to a new school and gets a fun new best friend who might not be the best influence," says Willingham. "Plus, Stephanie [a.k.a. the Spoiler] gets a rival for Tim's romantic affections. Tim's dad won't be such a moody poot all the time, and Alfred gets some fun things to do." Rick Mays and Aaron Sowd handle art for issues #121-#122 before giving way to new penciler Francisco Rodriguez de la Fuente.

(Marvel)

See Brian K. Vaughan feature on p. 96!

(WildStorm/DC)

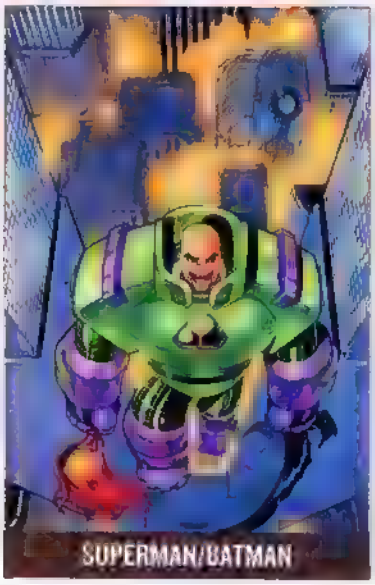
The hiatus ends in June with the premiere of Season Two of Ed Brubaker's acclaimed black-ops thriller. For the second campaign, Brubaker and artist Sean Philips plan to raise the stakes even higher. "Season Two really changes the status quo and has Holden less on the run and more in charge," promises the scribe. "Tao, Miss Misery and other old faces will return, but the thrust of the story moves in a different direction, as will be obvious to anyone who read the end of Season One."

(CrossGen)

The ice queen archer gets even frostier in 2004. This January, Arwyn busts out her brand new snowsuit and treks to the frozen wasteland of Skamhime in the multi-part storyarc begin-

DIDJA KNOW?

Greg Rucka, scribe on *Wonder Woman*, *Wolverine* and *Gotham Central*, is currently writing a *Queen & Country* novel adaptation of his creator owned Oni series, sections of which he reads aloud to audiences in Portland, Ore. where he resides.


SUPERMAN/BATMAN

SUPERMAN: BIRTHRIGHT

ning with issue #31, written by Ian Edginton and featuring gorgeous artwork by Greg Land. Along with the hard-nosed warrior Gareth and the lovely thief Cassidy, the intrepid archer will face off against a hideous beast with a taste for trolls and humans alike!

(Aspen Entertainment)

See the Top 10 Events on **p. 30**!

(Marvel)

In January's issue #9 and February's issue #10, by writer Paul Jenkins and artist Humberto Ramos, wraps up the "Countdown" storyline as Spider-Man finally confronts an amped-up Doc Ock in Times Square, before March's issue #11 begins a new storyarc with art by Damion Scott (*Batgirl*) which will feature the return of the rampaging Lizard! And for more Spider-Man, check out the Top 10 Events on **p. 28**!

(Dark Horse)

The 10-issue *Star Wars: Countdown* begins building excitement for the summer 2005 movie with writer Haden Blackman and artist Brian Ching showing advance looks at the new hardware, new locations and new characters from the final cinematic installment of the Star Wars saga (still to be titled, of course)! Starting in January, Blackman will collaborate with artist Ben Caldwell for *Star Wars. Clone Wars Adventures*, showcasing all-news stories in the style of the Cartoon Network shorts. And be sure to check out June's *Star Wars Tales* issue #20, featuring stories from indie greats Tony Millionaire, James Kolchaka and Pete Bagge!

(DC)

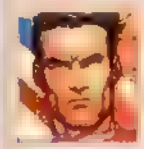
Mr. Majestic's tenure as the guardian of Metropolis in the three-part "Strange New Visitor" storyline comes to a climactic end in January's issue #201! Superboy, the new Steel and Krypto all believe that the mysterious new arrival is behind the city's crisis, and the heroes join forces to bring him down. Following the stunning conclusion, issue #202 gives us Part Three of the six-issue Turner/Kelly/Caldwell arc, which wraps up the following month in issue #203. And it all leads into the anticipated debut of Brian Azzarello and Jim Lee with April's issue #204 [see **p. 30** of the Top Ten Events of 2004 for the full scoop]!

(DC)

The battle to bring down Lex Luthor reaches a shocking finale as Jeph Loeb and Ed McGuinness wrap up the first arc of *Superman/Batman* in January's issue #6! Once the dust settles, artist Pat Lee (*Transformers*) steps in for a stand-alone story in February's issue #7, which guest-stars Superboy and Robin and explores the young heroes' relationships with their respective mentors. "Folks have wanted to see Robin and Superboy interact in this title," explains Loeb. "And when the deal with [Michael] Turner came together, we had this one-issue gap that became the perfect time to tell this story. Given what's coming with Supergirl, it's a chance to explore the relation-

SUPE-STITUTE

With Superman going AWOL for the first few months of 2004 and WildStorm character Mr. Majestic pinch-hitting as an ersatz Man of Steel, we looked at résumés from some other frontrunners who didn't make the cut for Big Blue's coveted gig.



HYPERION (Marvel)

Super-strength, invulnerability, found in a cornfield

Costume lacks cape; would fry Krypto with heat vision

Classified, of course

"I work for the government; people HAVE to trust me."

ULTRAMAN (DC)

Flight, super-strength, big letter on chest

Ugly, stupid and evil; spit curl has less sheen

Owl Man, Power Ring, other evil twins like K.A.R.R from "Knight Rider," the "Mirror, Mirror" Star Trek crew and the Olsens

"Ten points for kittens, 25 for the elderly...wait-a-sec...you want me to *save* these people?!? Screw that noise!"

ICON (Milestone/DC)

Flight, super-strength, affirmative action

That Kwanzaa-themed costume; couldn't even secure a guest-spot on "Static Shock"

Rocket, Hardware, Xombi and a bunch of other guys you've never heard of

"Anybody who doesn't think 'Meteor Man' is better than the first 'Superman' is trippin'."

GLADIATOR (Marvel)

Flight, super-strength, alien background, red cape; finds Kryptonite "tasty"

Way too tall

mohawk would prevent entrance into the Fortress of Solitude; purple skin causes him to be easily confused with the Parasite

The X-Men and the FF, all of whose asses he's kicked on numerous occasions

"I don't work with dogs. Or cats. Or horses. Or monkeys."

SUPREME (Awesome)

Had stories written by Alan Moore

Crotchety old man, thinks "Big Blue" refers to a 40-oz. Pabst Blue Ribbon

Alan Moore's beard

"You kids get the hell offa my lawn before I launch your asses to Kingdom Come! And I ain't talkin' about Alex Ross Land!"

■ **JESSE THOMPSON**

ONES TO WATCH

DUSTIN NGUYEN

Fans of Joe Casey's *Wildcats Version 3.0* know exactly what this talented rising star brings to the table—slick pencils that bring an eye-popping realistic edge to the mature WildStorm title.

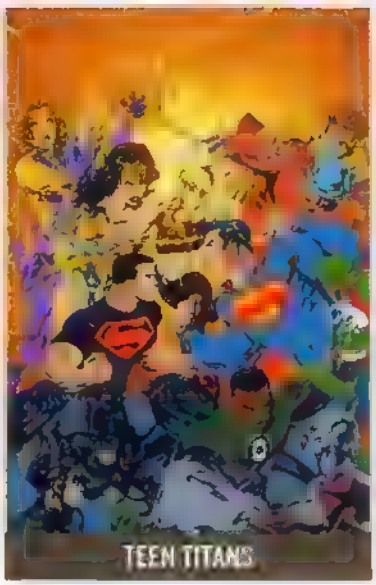
The Singaporean artist broke in the hard way, hawking samples at conventions until he finally landed a gig on *The Authority*. "I jumped in right when Frank Quitely jumped off the title," recalls Nguyen. "[WildStorm was] like, 'Well, if he does a good job, good—and if he messes up, no one cares, because he's a nobody!' [*laughs*]"

Nguyen may not be a household name yet—but industry insiders familiar with his work agree that *Batman* has the potential to launch the artist into the stratosphere. And once you see Nguyen's sleek renditon of the Dark Knight, you just might agree.

"*Batman*'s definitely going to help a lot," admits Nguyen when asked about his big break. "*Wildcats* was great because it prepared me for things to come, but *Batman* is the ultimate test for myself, to see how far I've gotten within the past few years. And hey, it can't hurt!"

Even more importantly, landing the DC icon was the fulfillment of a childhood dream for Nguyen. "Even when I got my first job at WildStorm, I knew at the time that I really wanted to draw *Batman*," says Nguyen.

How many artists can claim the Michael Jackson seal of approval? Before landing his first WildStorm gig, Nguyen worked at Stan Lee Media, where the artist had an unexpected encounter with the King of Pop. "He was visiting the studio," recalls Nguyen. "I was drawing, and he just walks up to me and says, 'You draw very nice!' I turned around, and I was like, 'Oh, sh--!' It was unreal."



TEEN TITANS

TRANSFORMERS

ships that Superman and Batman have with their respective proteges. Add to that some giant killer robots, and we've got a one-shot with Pat that kicks ass!" After that? Superstar artist Turner makes his superhero debut in March (see p. 60 for the full skinny)!

(DC)

With Clark Kent's origin established and Superman firmly entrenched in the cape and tights, Mark Waid and Leinil Yu plan to really turn up the heat in Metropolis starting with January's issue #6. "In that issue, things take a left turn you never saw coming," promises Waid. Issues #7-#8 reveal the backstory behind a teen Lex Luthor's friendship with Clark Kent, and explain why he doesn't recognize Superman now. "And believe me, it's not because he's wearing a pair of glasses," laughs Waid. "There's much more to it than that." But the real fireworks fly in a finale so shocking and unexpected that Waid will only hint at the specifics. "In order to completely discredit Superman, Lex takes the very essence of Clark Kent's heritage and uses it against him," says the scribe, "forcing Superman to literally fight for his birthright and reclaim the meaning of the 'S' symbol and his own reputation."

(Dreamwave)

Writer Peter David (*Fallen Angel*) and artist Lesean sent legions of robotic mousers after the heroes in a half-shell, but in January's issue #8 they'll be throwing down with their baddest enemy yet—T4, the Turtlenator! It's going to take all the Turtles' ninja training to survive Baxter Stockman's sentient killing machine as it seeks revenge on the turtles for all the mousers they destroyed. At the end of this arc, the Turtles will be forever changed!

(DC)

They may be weekend warriors, but saving the world continues to be a full-time job for the Teen Titans in 2004. Obsessed with the Titans after their harrowing first clash, Deathstroke trains a new student—the all-new Ravager—while tracking the young heroes on their quest to rescue Raven from the bloodthirsty 14-year-old Brother Blood. Look for Geoff Johns and Mike McKone to continue developing the various Titans as they continue to mesh as a team. "Robin will continue to struggle with his role on the Titans and what it's doing to him and his dad, while Superboy and Wonder Girl make a decision about where their relationship is going next," teases Johns. "Cyborg will also reveal the secret of his cybernetic parts, Kid Flash learns to drive and Beast Boy gets ready for a trip through public persecution."

DIDJA KNOW?

2004 marks writer Chris Claremont's 30th year on X-Men, and Marvel Comics plans to celebrate the milestone with a summer-long event that will see the fan-favorite writer turning the X-Universe on its head.

ULTIMATE FANTASTIC FOUR

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

(Dreamwave)

Just as *Transformers/G.I. Joe* wraps with issue #6, the mighty robots are kicking into high gear for "Transformers Month" in January. The new ongoing series from writer Brad Mick and artist Don Figueroa takes off with the debut of a brand new GI character! In *Transformers: Energon* #19, from writer Simon Furman and artist Guido Guidi, Megatron's only hope is his enemy Optimus Prime and in *Transformers: War Within* #4, Furman teams with artist Andrew Wildman for head-stompin' Grimlock story!

(Marvel)

See the Top 10 events on p. 24!

(Marvel)

Being fantastic ain't easy especially when you're teenaged wünderkid Reed Richards. After issue #1's climactic events, which saw a young Reed, Sue Storm, Ben Grimm and Johnny Storm begin their fantastic journey, January's *Ultimate Fantastic Four* #2 sees the future Mr. Fantastic developing a new invention that will change the world as he asks his friends to help him test it. After an accident, the FF gain their powers, only to face Ultimate Mole Man in March's issue #4 before the conclusion of the first arc in issue #5. After that, look for an arc featuring the debut of Ultimate Sub-Mariner, which according to co-writers Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Millar will lead into a major Ultimate event planned for December 2004.

(Marvel)

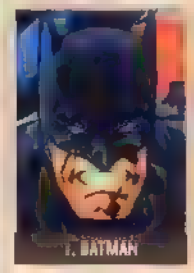
Keep a box of tissues near your bed; *Ultimate Spider-Man*'s getting a little naughty in '04. January's issue #42—Part Three of the four-part "Claws" storyline—features what writer Brian Michael Bendis calls a "fanboy fantasy" as Ultimate Black Cat and Ultimate Elektra square off in a no-holds-barred catfight. After "Claws" wraps up, March's issue #54 begins a five-part arc where Peter Parker finds out that Sony is making a "Spider-Man" film and not paying him. Featuring everyone from real "Spider-Man" director Sam Raimi and Marvel Studios President Avi Arad, the story sees Peter trying to get on set, only to be filmed by Raimi and Arad to save money on special effects. But Spidey's not the only superpowered being mad about the new film—Doc Ock also shows up to wreak havoc. "Something major will also be happening with Gwen Stacy that will shock people," reveals Bendis. "And right after that, we begin an arc with Ultimate Carnage. Somebody's going to die and Carnage is [revealed to be] somebody you already met in *Ultimate Spider-Man*."

(Marvel)

The X-factor on next year's *Ultimate X-Men* will definitely be the rotating creative teams of the hit book. January's *Ultimate X-Men* #41—the second part of the five-part "New Mutants" story by writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist David Finch—debuts a new mutant with a deadly power that only one of the X-Men can stop. As the arc leads to Bendis' final issue of the series with *Ultimate X-Men*

DOUBLE IDENTITY

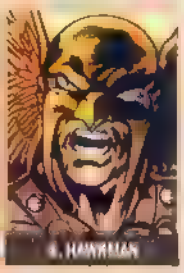
When DC's *Identity Crisis* (see p. 32) hits, fans will be buzzing about the story—and the impact of secret identities in comics. You know some of the more classic secret IDs (like Clark Kent/Superman), but did you know that some of your favorite heroes had *other* aliases they went by? See if you can match the hero pictured with the alternate identity they once used!



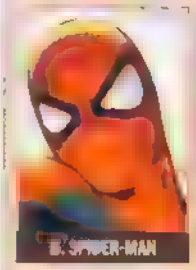
1. BATMAN

2. THOR

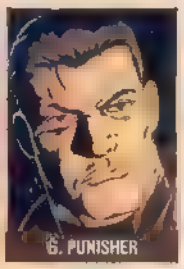
3. VISION



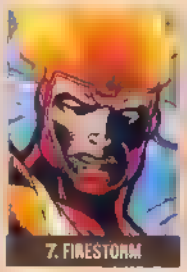
4. HAWKMAN



5. SPIDER-MAN



6. PUNISHER



7. FIRESTORM

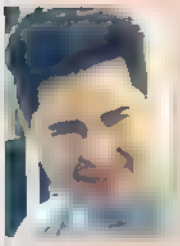
8. WOLVERINE

A. Johnny Tower
B. Hannibal Hawkes
C. Matches Malone
D. Ben Reilly
E. Patch
F. Jim Hammond
G. Dr. Martin Stein
H. Jake Olson

ANSWERS: 1-C, 2-H, 3-E, 4-B, 5-D, 6-A, 7-G, 8-F

ONES TO WATCH

WILL PFEIFER



Pfeifer crafted the cheesy Dial "H" For Hero concept into an enthralling tale of ordinary folks struggling with newfound superpowers that ranges from hilarious to heartrending. His next reclamation project will be returning the king of the sea to his rightful throne when he takes on *Aquaman*.

By modernizing Dial "H" For Hero with riffs on MTV's "Jackass" and deep explorations of how a sudden onset of superpowers can make or break a person's life, Pfeifer demonstrates that some people aren't cut out for the superhero biz—but the writer plans to show there's one guy who's got what it takes to make waves in the DCU. When he takes over writing duties on *Aquaman* starting with February's issue #15, Pfeifer wants to ensure that the much-maligned Aquaman is restored to his former glory as one of DC Comics' premier heroes when he tackles the villain behind a major disaster that strikes San Diego, plunging it into the Pacific Ocean. "We're going to strip Aquaman back to basics," said Pfeifer, "Then let him cut loose in his own corner of the DC Universe. [Artist] Patrick Gleason and I are jazzed to be working on the book and we want to make Aquaman one of the top-notch heroes in the DCU."

Just like Clark Kent, the superhero thing isn't a full-time gig for Pfeifer, who spends his days working at a newspaper. He's the assistant features editor at the *Rockford Register Star*, a daily newspaper about 75 miles outside of Chicago. He also writes a weekly video review column and occasional pop culture articles. You can check out his articles at http://go.rrstar.com. ■ RH

UNCANNY X-MEN

USAGI YOJIMBO

#44, people inside the American government begin to believe that Professor Xavier has been manipulating the president, while the Commander-in-Chief begins to form his own mutant team—including Dazzler, Alex Summers and Emma Frost—as a tactical alternative to the X-Men. Later on in 2004, look for *Kabuki* creator David Mack to take over writing duties on the series with *Ultimate X-Men* #50, which features the surprising appearance of Wolverine's wife!

(Marvel)

January's *Wolverine* #10 begins part four of the five-part "Coyote Crossing" storyline by writer Greg Rucka and artist Leandro Fernandez as Wolvie goes south of the border to uncover the man responsible for the deaths of 19 people, but the man behind the conspiracy isn't who Wolverine thinks. With March's issue #12, by Rucka and artist Darrick Robertson, the story explores the unconscious dreams of Logan before April's issue #13 begins a five-part storyline that will prove Wolverine is not alone and there's a woman sporting striking similarities to the feral X-Man that Logan must track down. The arc, Rucka's last on the book, will also feature the return of Sabretooth, Wolverine's greatest foe. And for more on Wolverine, check out *Origin II* in the Top 10 Events on **p. 26**!

(DC)

Greg Rucka and Drew Johnson's acclaimed first arc comes to a close when "Down to Earth" concludes with the anniversary issue #200! Veronica Cale unleashes an updated version of one of Diana's deadliest enemies, and the manipulations of Ares lead to some dire consequences for the Amazons of Themyscira. And that's only the beginning. "There's an immediate follow-up to the events of issue #200 in #201, and issue #202 is a departure that's going to focus on one of our villains," says Rucka. "We'll flesh out that character, leading into the next major arc called 'Stoned' in which we continue to complicate Diana's life while she tries to do everything she can to save the planet—potentially at the exclusion of other very important duties. And all this will lead to a new very old villain, who's gonna be awesome!"

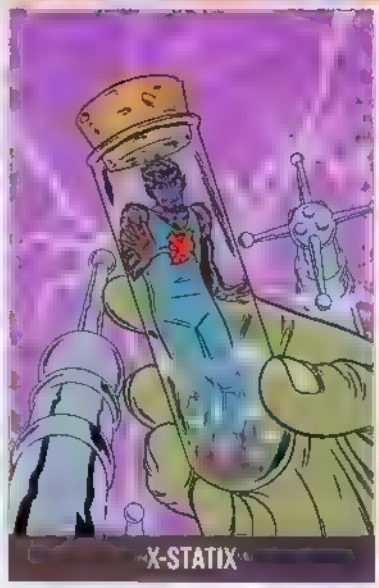
(Dark Horse)

2004 marks the samurai rabbit's 20th anniversary! As "The Father & Son" storyline wraps in issue #75, Usagi must decide whether to reveal to Jotaro that he's the boy's real father—but first they have to thwart a plot to assassinate the lord of the Geishu Clan! The next arc concentrates on short stories featuring fan-favorites like the super-sleuth Inspector Ishida and Gen the bounty hunter.

DIDJA KNOW?

Ron Marz's return to *Green Lantern* marks the scribe's first GL story since *Green Lantern* #125, back in 2000. Marz's run on the book lasted seven years and spanned nearly 75 issues (starting with 1994's issue #51).

WOLVERINE


X-STATIX

(Top Cow)
Get your death pools ready, you morbid fanboys—the results of the *Witchblade* death poll are going to get tallied in March's issue #75—and it's not going to be pretty when the "winner" gets canned. After writer David Wohl and artist Francis Manapul wrap up their run with the explosive anniversary issue, a new big-name writer hops aboard with April's issue #76 along with new penciler David Nakayama from *Wizard*'s "Top Cow Intern Contest." Plus, writer Chris Claremont (*X-Treme X-Men*) and artist Eric Basaldua (*Magdalena*) team the Witchblade wielder with Wolverine for a one-shot in May!

(Marvel)
A rabid ground of satire and celebrity skewering, *X-Statix* gets even racier next year. January's *X-Statix* #18 brings the six-part "Back From the Dead" arc to a close, as the team of mutants must figure out why a mysterious CD is killing its listeners, courtesy of writer Peter Milligan and artist Mike Allred. February and March's issues #19-#20 begin a two-part arc that reveals one of Professor X's assistants is good for more than just fixing the coffee machine, as he discovers a way to cure Vivisector [a k a. Myles Alfred] of his mutant lycanthropy. Following that, April's issue #21 begins a five- to six-part story that features a war between the X-Statix and Avengers, reminiscent of the old Avengers/Defenders wars of comics past. "F--- *JLA/Avengers*," says Editor Axel Alonso. "This is going to be the biggest fight ever. Doop explodes and his dark heart is somewhere around the world and it needs to be found or there will be dire consequences."

(Marvel)
As writer Grant Morrison and artist Marc Silvestri embark on Morrison's last four-issue *New X Men* tale (see Top Ten Events of 2004, **p. 28**), the *X-Treme X-Men* team of writer Chris Claremont and artist Igor Kordey begin Parts One and Two of the six-part "Bogan" storyline, running though April's *X-Treme X-Men* #40 to April's issue #45. Focusing on a mysterious telepath who enters the team's lives and begins wreaking havoc, this tale focuses on an unknown assailant that captures Bishop and Sage, discovering a startling secret in the process. Over in January's *Uncanny X-Men* #437 and #438, writer Chuck Austen and artist Salvador Larroca begin the five-part "She Lies with Angels" story that revolves around a Romeo and Juliet-like tale between a mutant and human who fall in love, much to the chagrin of both individual's parents. After that, look for Austen to jump onto both *New X-Men* and *Uncanny X-Men* for a four-issue arc that will tie up all the loose ends of his and Morrison's tales before some major reshuffling in the X-books' lineup. The big question? Who will be taking over New X-Men from Grant Morrison on a full-time basis?

(DC/Vertigo)
See Brian K. Vaughan feature on **p. 96**!

THE GREAT BEYOND

With comic fans eagerly awaiting the launch of DC Comics' *Identity Crisis* (which has nothing to do with *Crisis on Infinite Earths*) and Marvel's *Secret War* (which has nothing to do with *Secret Wars*), we thought we'd eavesdrop on the IMs of the stars of those two respective series—the dreaded Anti-Monitor and all-powerful Beyonder—and see how they're handling their continued comic book exile.

BEYONDER

ANTI-MONITOR

I am SO going to kick Bendis in the nuts. How can he write something called 'Secret War' and not put me in it?

...

You there?

AntEmonitor: yeah im here. im reading zero hour again and I still cant make heads or tails of this thing.

Who cares! Aren't you even just a little pissed that you're not in 'Identity Crisis'?

AntEmonitor: nah. It's not like its a sequel to my book or anything. plus there's a rumor they might make a dc direct action figure of me. so I don t wanna rock the boat

WHAT?!? Are you kidding me? You're okay with all this?

AntEmonitor: youre just mad that the toad has a marvel legends figure and you don't.

...

AntEmonitor: ha! thats it, isnt it? youre pissed you don t have a toy!

...I think you should shut up.

AntEmonitor: not that you can blame toybiz. What was your costume again? a gheri curl michael jackson doo with a white lounge suit? all you needed was a t-shirt with "i am gay" printed on the front to complete the look.

Like you should talk.

AntEmonitor: yo, my helmets cool. you should look into some new threads, man. maybe if you didn't look like the poster boy for a vhl clip show you could guest star in marvel two in one or something. they still print that, right?

hey, show a little respect, man. I was on an episode of the Spider-Man cartoon.

AntEmonitor: yeah, you and Ms. Lion.

MS. LION

...I am so going to kick you in the nuts. ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**

ALSO IN 2004

ABADAZAD

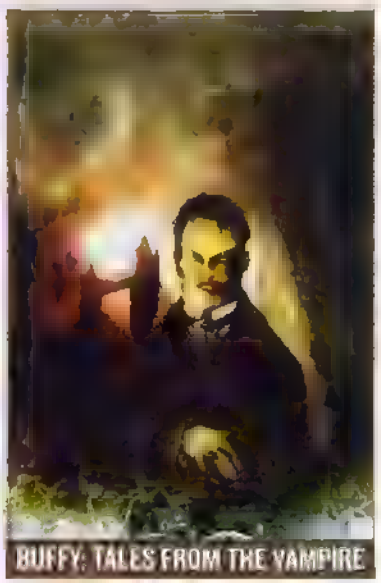
(CrossGen)
The thrilling coming-of-age fantasy from writer J M. DeMatteis and artist Mike Ploog sees the young Kate whisked off to a magical world in January's issue #2. Before she can even get her quest underway, she must first survive an attack from the Lanky Man's Rocket Heads—and the Knights of Abadazad aren't much help!

(Top Cow)
The genetically engineered super-hot super-soldier will be blasting her way back into comics with a new series kicking off in July from newcomer scribe Josh Ortega and artist Eric Basaldua!

BATGIRL

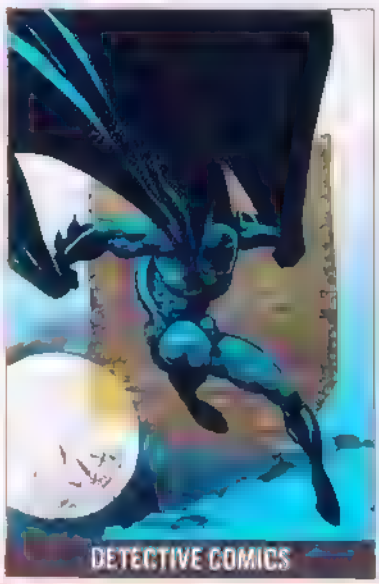
(DC)
The friction between Cassandra and Batman continues to build in early 2004, and eventually comes to a head in March's issue #50 when the two slug it out over Batman's decision to bench Batgirl!

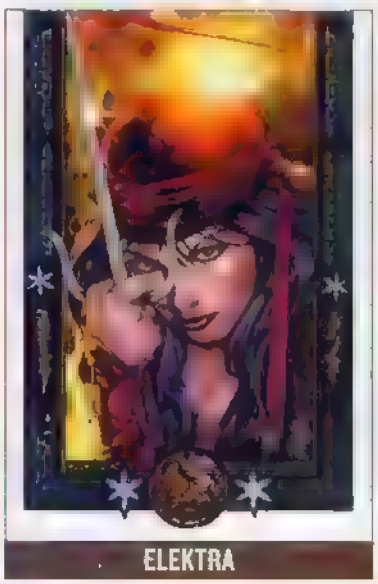
(Dark Horse)
The *Tales From the Vampire* mini-series from writer Joss Whedon and a rotating crew of artists tell chilling stories of the vampires in Buffy's world, with January's issue #2 featuring Scott Morse (*Barefoot Serpent*) and February's issue #3 showcasing a tale from Whedon's co-writer on the "Buffy" TV-series, Drew Goddard!


BUFFY: TALES FROM THE VAMPIRE

(DC)
January's issue #790 features the debut of new creative team Andersen Gabrych and Pete Woods, and issue #791 begins a three-issue storyarc called "The Surrogate" in which Batman races against the clock to save Dr. Leslie Thompkins and a young pregnant woman from a gaggle of ruthless kidnappers and gangsters.

(Marvel)
January's *Elektra* #31 wraps up the final part of the "Prophet and Loss" arc, as Elektra must decide whether or not to fulfill her contract even if her target is an 8-year-old boy. Issue #32, also shipping in January, begins the three-part "Fever" story, as the assassin


DETECTIVE COMICS

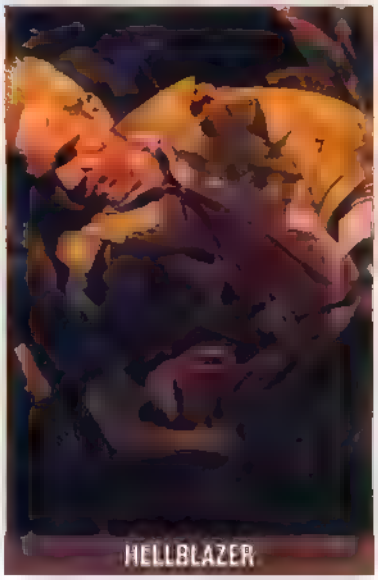

ELEKTRA

THE BOON

ALSO IN 2004

GOTHAM CENTRAL

GOTHAM KNIGHTS


HELLBLAZER

must take out a Russian mobster while dealing with one hell of a flu virus.

(Marvel)
Turning her back on her family's wealth and privilege for the first time, a young Emma Frost must make it alone in the world, but soon discovers her new life is even more frightening than the one she left behind in January's issue #7, which kicks off a six-part arc running through June.

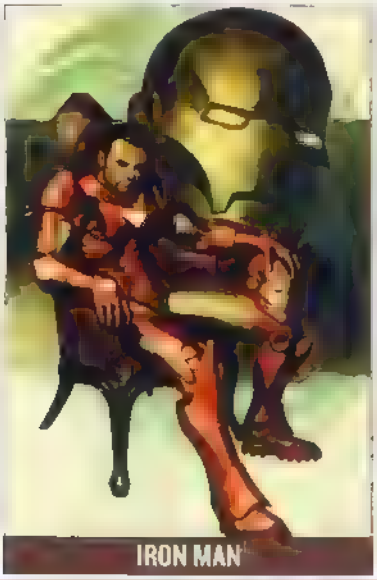
(Dark Horse)
Eric Powell's indie sensation continues shipping bimonthly installments of monster mayhem and drunken disorder when Goon and Franky brave hungry hordes of zombies to rescue their buddy, Buzzard. Writer/artist Powell promises readers will see a major turning point in poor Goon's craptacular life!

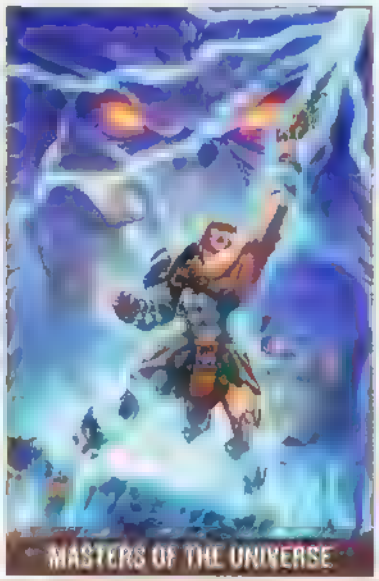
(DC)
Following The Joker's sniper spree in January's issue #15, writers Ed Brubaker and Greg Rucka and artist Michael Lark kick off a new three-issue arc that brings back an old face who rattles the nerves of the squad. Can anyone say Harvey Bullock?

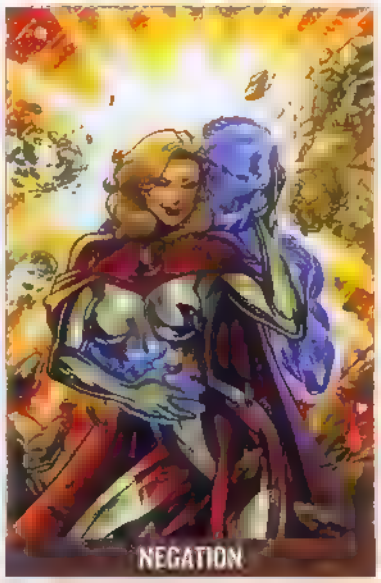
(DC)
Villains are the name of the game when the new creative team of A.J. Lieberman and Al Barrionuevo debut in February's issue #50. First up is the return of the mysterious Hush, who immediately takes on the Joker for supremacy in Gotham's underworld

(DC/Vertigo)
The five-part "Staring at the Wall" gets hotter than Satan's stove top when Constantine disappears, the world spins out of control and Swamp Thing picks up the slack in issues #192 and #192 in January and February.

(Marvel)
Locked in a confirmation hearing to become the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Tony Stark must face his past to save the future of the country from a rogue Pentagon operative in January's issue #76, which begins Part


IRON MAN


MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE


NEGATION

ALSO IN 2004

Four of the six-part "The Best Defense" arc.

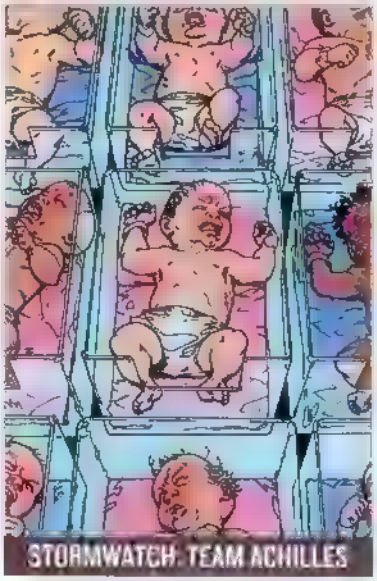
(MV Creations)
When *MoTU* volume 3 hits in February, it hits hard! Starting with issue #3, the action goes bi-monthly as He-Man breaks from cartoon continuity. Expect colossal clashes with the Snake Men and the Evil Horde—plus the death of a major character!

(CrossGen)
Writer Tony Bedard and artist Paul Pelletier are putting the baddest of the bad together when evil queen Evinlea hooks up with the emperor of destruction Charon in January's issue #26. Then the War takes over *Negation* for six amazing issues that will see worlds rocked and heroes die!

(Image)
Writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Michael Avon Oeming kickstart their adult superhero crime series with a new #1 issue in March. After the events of February's issue #38, all super powers are made illegal! Check out a special original six-page story in March's *Wizard Edge*!

(Marvel)
The five-part "Thin Air" arc of the newly retitled (and MAX-free) *Alias* features Jessica Jones dealing with her pregnancy and life with Luke Cage, as well as taking a job at the *Daily Bugle*, where she becomes involved in a story dealing with Spider-Man and the Green Goblin. Look for later issues to involve Marvel's top heroes, including a possible *Secret War* [see Top Ten Events, p. 31]

THE PULSE


STORMWATCH: TEAM ACHILLES

crossover as well as a Wolverine tale.

(Oni Press)
Writer Greg Rucka joins with artist Mike Hawthorne (*Three Days in Europe*) through April's issue #24 where Tara Chace breaks in yet another Minder. Then comes the landmark double-sized issue #25 featuring the return of artist Steve Rolston (*One Bad Day*)!

(CrossGen)
In the midst of a blistering battle with the forces of evil, Cassie and Sheriff Cisco are trapped in the demon-infested Communist state of Rodinia. Writer Tony Bedard and artist Karl Moline pit the ghostbusters against the ghoulish secret police in January's issue #20!

(Image)
January's 80-page issue #115 features the reformation of Freak Force and a slugfest between all the heroes from *Savage Dragon* versus the Vicious Circle. Then comes a yearlong storyline that sees the Dragon run for President of the United States!

(Marvel)
January's issue #68 features the return of an old villain in a stand-alone story. Also in January, look for May Parker to take on the Man-Wolf as John Jameson returns in issue #69's two-part tale.

(WildStorm/DC)
In the aftermath of February's *Coup D'Etat*, writer Micah Ian Wright goes in a brand new direction starting with issue #20 as the team undergoes changes in personnel, the types of missions they take and the people they work for

(Top Cow)
Sultry adventurer Lara Croft finds herself facing off against a cult of Druids at Stonehenge for a two-part arc starting in January's issue #38 from writer James Bonny and artist Wilson Tortosa (*Battle of the Planets*), who will be making his debut on the book

(CrossGen)
Boon and Po Po find a treasure-filled cave in January's issue #21, but they also find its ferocious guardian! Writer Chuck Dixon and artist Luke Ross go bananas in issue #22 when they leave Boon in the cave and let Po Po the monkey try to save the day!

(WildStorm/DC)
The events of February's *Coup D'Etat* spectacular open the door for the revival of Whilce Portacio's creation in April. Portacio and writer Mike Carey plan to recreate the same mix of hi-tech military science and supernatural threats in the new ongoing series—with a frightening new spin.

(WildStorm/DC)
March's issue #19 by Joe Casey and guest artist Francisco Ruiz Velasco jumpstarts the massive six-issue "Coda War One" arc that brings Zealot to the forefront. Plus, the crippled Grifter gets in on the action with a redesigned Ladytron as his personal war machine.

WAY OF THE RAT

REBECCA ROMIJN-STAMOS

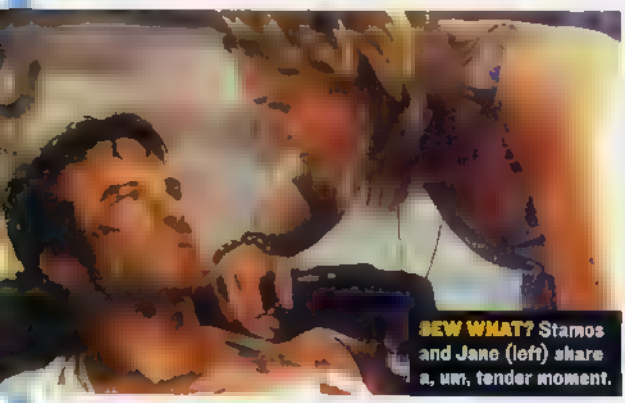
The 'Punisher' siren details the mystique of her 'loser' role and how her gutsy performance really stung her co-star Thomas Jane

WIZARD: You portray Joan the Mouse in April's "Punisher" movie. What's Joan's relationship with Frank Castle, a.k.a. The Punisher?

ROMIJN-STAMOS: Joan's this down and out recovering drug addict just trying to get her life back together. She lives in this shabby tenement building that Frank Castle [portrayed by Thomas Jane] moves into as he is just getting over the death of his family and turning into the Punisher. He's this mysterious guy doing all this stuff in his apartment and none of us who live in the building can figure out who he is or what it is that he's doing. And I think my character relates to him. I identify with him as somebody who just doesn't care about life anymore because he's lost his family and he's drinking heavily

What attracted you to playing this mousy character?

I liked playing somebody who is just sort of a loser. She's a waitress just trying to get her life back together and she's struggling. Of course I've never been a drug addict, but I mean everyone knows what it's like to struggle and to try and change their lives and that's what my character's trying to do.



SEW WHAT? Stamos and Jane (left) share a, um, tender moment.

Will Joan have the same family relationship that she has with the clueless Spacker Dave and the obese Mr. Bumpo in the comics?

Spacker Dave and Bumpo become her family and they are incredibly attached to each other and they are sort of...they are all they have for each other. And they sort of become the surrogate family for Frank. And they become, I hope if we pull it off, the reason that he does make it. He sort of gets a glimpse that there is something out there to live for, that there are still good people in the world.

What's the craziest thing that happened to you on set?

There's one point where Frank gets stabbed in the chest and I have to sew him up. So we made these prosthetic wounds for Tom Jane and I had to sew these flesh wounds on camera. And it was so funny because I'm doing it and they've got the cameras rolling and it took awhile for me to figure it out and I'm trying not to tear the prosthetic and I'm being really, really careful, because I'm using real surgical equipment. The next morning I come in and Tom goes, "There's something I have to show you. Come over here."

I had sewn the prosthetic to his skin! And there were these close-up photographs of this blood coagulated underneath the prosthetics and sure enough on his chest there were five little tiny scabs in a row where I had, in fact, sewn the prosthetic to Thomas Jane's chest! And I'm like, "First of all, you didn't even flinch when we were shooting this yesterday! You didn't say anything!" I was like, "You let me! Are you that committed to this role that you don't even notice that I'm putting a needle through your skin?!"

> **"I accidentally sewed the prosthetic to Thomas Jane's chest! He didn't even flinch!"**
>
> STAMOS ON STITCHING A FAKE WOUND

Talk about being lost in the role...

It was actually pretty funny. It became our thing, and then at the end of the shoot he gave me a book called *Wound Care Made Easy.*

Who do you think's tougher? Frank Castle or Wolverine?

It's not fair to compare because Frank Castle doesn't have superpowers. He's a vigilante. He's a real guy. And he doesn't have adamantium in him. But I have to say, without the adamantium, without the claws, it would be a good fight.

What's worse—being covered in fake blood or being painted blue for hours upon hours as Mystique?

I'd have to go with the blue. Yeah, it was really nice to not have to be covered in blue for this. That's a fact. Fake blood is kind of exciting. Nothing's better than fake blood

This is going to be your third Marvel movie. Are there any other Marvel characters or just comic characters in general that you'd like to play down the line?

There is something that Avi [Arad, Marvel Studios President] and I have been talking about for awhile now. It's a little preliminary so I don't want to jinx it. But it's something that I've wanted to play for a long time and he's into it also, so I think we're going to try and develop that at some point

Did you know Mystique has her own comic now? Have you checked it out?

She does? This is news to me. Is it based on the movie Mystique or the original?

It's based more on the original version; in this series anyway, she's much more vocal...

Okay, yeah, because my character description for Mystique is a little R-rated. The way I describe Mystique is she'd f—'em as fast as she'd fight 'em. I don't know if you can print that! ■ **JESSE THOMPSON**

IN ARM'S WAY Spidey's hoping Doc Ock can scratch that nasty itch between his shoulders.

BY RICHARD HO

SPiN CiTY

WIZARD swings onto the 'Spider-Man 2' set in L.A.—just in time to see Peter Parker and Aunt May go broke

Sam Raimi and company are taking Spider-Man to the bank.

Literally.

On the corner of Spring and 7th in downtown Los Angeles, curious pedestrians strolling along the sidewalk can catch glimpses of the cast and crew of "Spider-Man 2" through the large windows of the old headquarters of the Bank of America, long abandoned and in serious decline before the blockbuster Sony production got ahold of it. After just a few days of around-the-clock refurbishing, the set designers have magically restored the decrepit building to the glory of its heyday—right down to the beautiful Sistine Chapel-like ceiling.

On this cloudless afternoon, director Sam Raimi shuffles about the cluttered set, checking the status of prop designers, lighting technicians and camera operators alike before finally returning to his chair. Settling into his seat, the director's trademark suit looks a bit more crumpled than usual—a subtle reflection of his recent cold. "I'm feeling much better now," assures the fully recovered director, his eye gleaming with an intense desire to make up for lost time.

Raimi diverts his attention down to the sun-drenched pit in the center of the vast bank floor. Nestled into a corner, actors Tobey Maguire and Rosemary Harris (Peter Parker and Aunt May, respectively) rehearse their lines under the gaze of Raimi's monitors, which are set up on a raised patio overlooking the scene. Dressed in warm winter clothes—which seems odd considering the mild 83-degree heat—the actors laugh and joke with the rest of the crew. The atmosphere is relaxed, with a familiarity born of previous success...and the feeling that they've done this before. Maguire and Harris take their seats at a stately wooden desk, opposite a bank manager who's about to give the Parkers a cold, uncompassionate shoulder

"Sam Raimi will break my legs!"

—Avi Arad on teasing "Spidey 2" secrets

AIRBORNE BUG Spidey's coming dangerously close to splattering on a taxicab's windshield.

A frigid New York City scene, filmed across the country in the balmy air of Southern California. But for the movie magicians responsible for bringing the friendly neighborhood wall-crawler back to the silver screen, the 3,000-mile trip is as natural as a stroll through Central Park.

After all, Peter Parker may be a New Yorker through and through, but Spider-Man is a bona fide Hollywood star. And this is his home away from home

CROSS-COUNTRY CRAWL

The odyssey began in April 2003

Less than a year after the debut of "Spider-Man" took the box office by storm, "Spider-Man 2" began filming in locations in New York with an eye towards a July 2, 2004 premiere. All the principal players from the first go-around returned for seconds, including producers Avi Arad and Laura Ziskin, director Raimi and stars Maguire, Harris, Kirsten Dunst and James Franco (for an update on all of the returning and new characters, see sidebar). The seasoned veterans were joined on set by newcomers Alfred Molina ("Identity"), who tackles the role of Spidey's multi-limbed adversary, the maniacal Doc Ock; Dylan Baker ("Head of State"), who plays Dr. Curt Connors, the man destined to become the Lizard; and Daniel Gillies ("Jeremiah"), who plays astronaut John Jameson, J. Jonah Jameson's son and a new contestant for Mary Jane's affections.

And just like the first film, the six-month shoot spanned both ends of the country, from sea to shining sea. Only this time, the cross-country journey was flipped around, as the production shipped out to L.A. in July for the final leg of shooting after a stint in NYC.

Beyond the familiar faces and surroundings, however, nearly all other facets of the sequel promise to break new ground. The plot of "Spider-Man 2" will undoubtedly expand on the key relationships established in the first film, as well as introduce new elements to further complicate the life of our web-slinging hero. Not only will the younger Jameson turn the tense Peter/MJ relationship into a romantic triangle, but Peter will have to deal with yet another complex dual relationship (á la Norman Osborn/Green Goblin) in the form of Otto Octavius/Doc Ock

Everything else remains hidden in a web of mystery—especially details about the tentacled villain. After unveiling a tantalizing glimpse of Doc Ock in action in July, Raimi's desire to keep all other details of the good doctor under wraps—as well as his four mechanical friends—has stoked fan frenzy to a fever pitch. Meanwhile, rumors surrounding the role of Curt Connors have led to a great deal of speculation And while it doesn't appear likely that the Lizard will make an appearance in this film, many fans have concluded that the reptilian villain will play a prominent role in "Spider-Man 3."

But right now, Raimi has his hands full with film #2.

BANKING ON SUCCESS

Considering the overwhelming success of the first "Spider-Man," it's pretty fitting that today's scene be filmed at a bank.

With 2002's blockbuster establishing Spidey's reputation as a bankable Hollywood franchise, the only question concerning the sequel was how quickly it could get off the ground. And despite rumors that the budget has far surpassed the mark established on the first film, studio execs remain confident in the film's upside. After all, "Blade 2" and "X2" each outgrossed "Blade" and "X-Men," respectively—and with "Spider-Man" grossing more than $800 million worldwide, Sony is banking on "Spider-Man 2" to bring in similar numbers.

The financial outlook for Aunt May, on the other hand, ain't so pretty.

The scene being shot today is a quiet one—with a touch of humor—as Peter accompanies Aunt May to the bank to try to secure a loan from an uncooperative bank manager. On Raimi's mark, the set designers stop their drilling and hammering, and police officers halt traffic outside, reducing street noise to a whisper

All is quiet, the scene is set and Raimi yells, "Action!"

SPIDEY CAMERAS...ROLLING!

Raimi likes to get a spider's-eye view of the action.

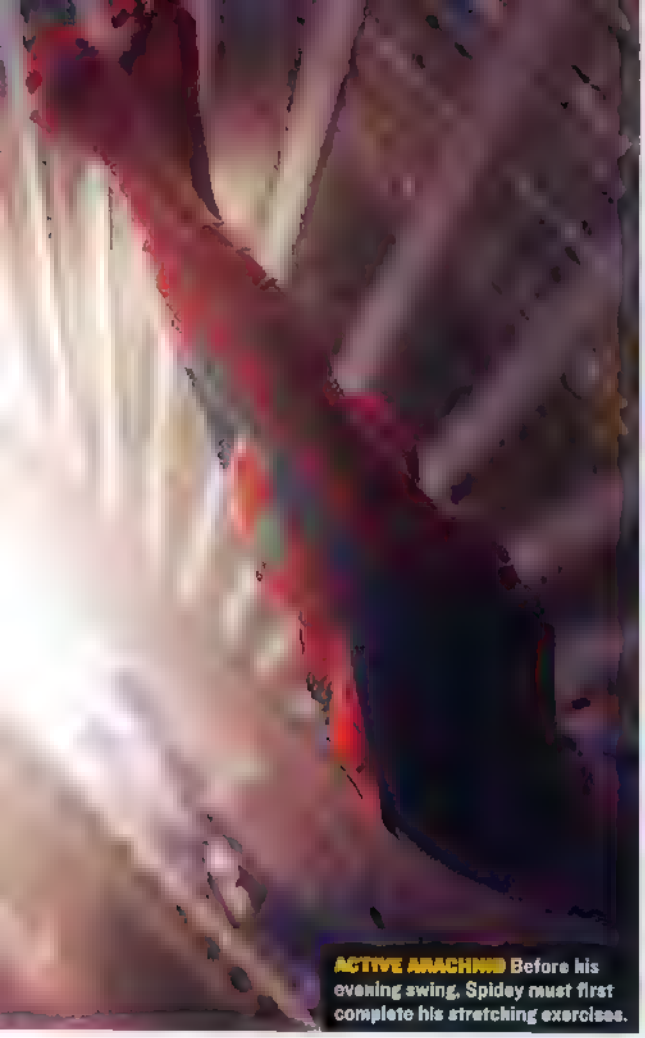
Not willing to let the wall of monitors obstruct his vantage point, the director jumps up onto his chair to get a better view of the scene as it plays out. Crouching on all fours, the man responsible for bringing the web-slinging hero to movie life bears a striking resemblance to Spidey himself, perched high atop the towering crest of the Empire State Building.

Need any more proof that Raimi understands his lead character?

Two different versions of the scene are being filmed today, the first requiring Aunt May, who looks as sweet and grandmotherly as ever, to lie to the bank manager. Peter, looking sharp in a well-tailored suit but with the same awkward geekiness from the first film, gives his beloved aunt a quizzical look, leading to a disastrous exchange between the two.

Raimi chuckles after every take.

After five tries from various angles, Raimi instructs the crew to move on to the second version of the scene, which calls for an extended exchange between Peter and May The two engage in yet another awkward conversation, filled with plenty of painfully phony banter in an attempt to trick the bank man-



ACTIVE ARACHNID Before his evening swing, Spidey must first complete his stretching exercises.

ager—again, with disastrous results.

Of course, for Raimi and the crew, things couldn't be going any smoother

Marvel Studios President Avi Arad arrives on set around 2:30 and takes a seat next to Raimi. While fishing around for a set of headphones, the producer gets the skinny from his director, who shows him video playback of the previous takes. Half an hour later, Raimi yells, "Cut. ..print!" after the final take, and the crew disbands for lunch.

When they return around 4:00, the crew starts setting up for a close-up shot—of the actors' feet! The scene is painstakingly blocked, with Raimi calling out instructions to the actors from above. Strangely enough, all the scenes that require dialogue and emotion go off without a hitch, but *this* shot takes no less than *14* tries to get right!

Following Take #12, Raimi turns to the assembled crowd behind his monitor and deadpans, "This is a strange job, isn't it?"

Raimi should know better than anyone—in a world of radioactive spiders and killer mechanical tentacles, strange is a relative term.

THAT'S A WRAP

Times may be tough for Peter and Aunt May—but for the cast and crew of "Spider-Man 2," things couldn't be any rosier

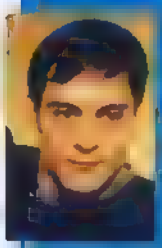
With post-production in full swing and the July 2, 2004 premiere a mere six months away, expectations are as tall as a Manhattan skyscraper. But judging from what we've seen so far and the incredible support from Spidey fans around the world, it's a pretty good bet that the most anticipated comic film sequel of all time will scale those expectations—and then some.

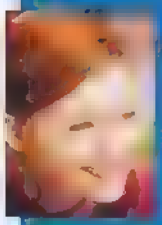
In fact, you can bank on it.

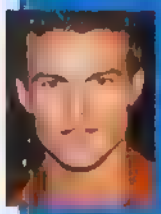
Staff Writer Richard Ho may not lie to bank managers, but he has convinced his mom that he owns this magazine.

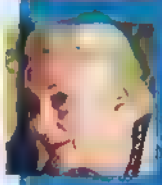
ROLL CALL

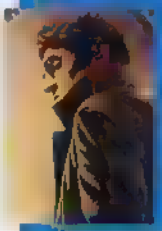
Spider-Man's web gets a few more strands this July, as "Spider-Man 2" brings back familiar faces from the original and introduces a few new characters for good measure. *Wizard*'s got ya covered with a handy quick-reference guide to all the players in the sequel—and Marvel Studios President Avi Arad even gives his take on the extended Spider-Family!











SUPERMAN/ BATMAN #8

Jeph Loeb turns up the thermostat with superstar artist Mike Turner on the next arc of the popular team-up title

BY RICHARD HO

When the two most powerful men in the world need backup, who do they call?

The world's most powerful woman, of course.

Starting with March 24's issue #8, Wonder Woman will grace the pages of *Superman/Batman* in a six-issue arc that marks the mainstream superhero debut of superstar artist Mike Turner. According to writer Jeph Loeb, the Amazonian princess joins the World's Finest duo for a mission with truly universal consequences.

"The center piece of the story is how each of these characters want to take responsibility for a mysterious young girl who could affect the balance of the universe," reveals Loeb. "The story allows us to see how each of these characters—who are friends first and allies second—handle this situation."

Don't expect a team-up in the traditional sense, as Loeb plans to pit the three icons against each other on philosophical levels. "What I really like is that Wonder Woman, in many ways, is the voice of reason in this story—even though what she wants to do is the most radical choice," explains Loeb. "It's a wild ride and hopefully, at the end, all three characters' dynamics will have not exactly been changed, but shifted."

Of course, Wonder Woman won't be the only strong female character showing up in the second *Superman/Batman* arc. In fact, the mysterious young girl mentioned by Loeb will be none other than a new Supergirl (hence the title of the storyline, "The Supergirl from Krypton"). Though details of her involvement remain a mystery, it's a sure bet that she won't be the same Supergirl we knew before. "I can tell you that she is *not* the pre-Crisis girl since that character doesn't exist and never existed in modern continuity," confirms Loeb. "And this won't be 'Return to Krypton: Part 3.' The idea is to tell a very straightforward story that brings back a character that you've never seen before. Supergirl is a great character, and she's been tried several different ways—but DC wanted to bring it back to the core character."

And Loeb didn't stop there. To make "The Supergirl from Krypton" a true epic, the scribe needed a villain that could do the tale justice—and he found one by looking to the stars. "When we first started breaking the story, I wanted to have someone that could give the story the stature that it needed," explains Loeb. "There really was only one choice." And while the scribe remains tight-lipped about the identity of this cosmic villain, he promises that the baddie will represent the perfect nemesis for the world's three greatest heroes. "He is such a wonderfully tremendous evil, and his motivation is so clean and simple that it worked quite deliciously," enthuses Loeb. "Our heroes have something he wants and for a very good reason they don't want to give it—or more appropriately, *her*—to him. We won't see him at the beginning, but he'll be coming in soon enough."

Loeb points out that Turner had a hand in crafting the story as well. "He's very involved and I wouldn't want it any other way," says Loeb. "He's an excellent storyteller and he's not shy about poking at the overall plot to see what needs to make it stronger."

And just in case you don't believe him, check out eight of those pages with this exclusive preview of March's *Superman/Batman* #8!

HEIGHT CLUB Superman wonders how much starch Batman uses to keep those ears standing so straight.

I am alone...
I know that I have my wife, my parents, even friends...
...but I am alone.
BATMAN ..
NO, CLARK.
YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I'M GOING TO ASK!
YES. I DO AND THE ANSWER IS STILL -- NO.
WELL. THEN THERE MUST BE SOMETHING I CAN BE DOING
YOU ALREADY ARE DOING IT
He is unhappy. Not that I blame him. If our roles were reversed and I were quarantined to The Cave, I would be unhappy as well.

I'VE BEEN ON MONITOR DUTY FOR ELEVEN DAYS
AND YOU AGREED TO GIVING US TWO WEEKS. LAST TIME I CHECKED THAT WAS FOURTEEN DAYS.

MY FATE IS IN THE HANDS OF PLASTIC MAN. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW THAT INSTILLS ME WITH CONFIDENCE.
WE HAVE THE JLA, THE JSA, THE TITANS, AND THE OUTSIDERS ALL WORKING OVERTIME ON THIS
SO, DO US ALL A FAVOR, STAY OFF THIS COMM-LINK --
-- AND GO PLAY WITH YOUR DOG.

DON'T BRING THE DOG INTO THIS EVERY TIME YOU GET ANNOYED, YOU BRING UP THE DOG.
NO, I JUST FIND IT. CURIOUS THAT APPARENTLY THE SUM TOTAL OF YOUR KRYPTONIAN HERITAGE IS YOU...
..IRRADIATED ROCK WHICH IS LETHAL TO YOU..
...AND A FOUR-LEGGED --
-- CAT BARBECUING --
DAMN
BATMAN?

SUPERGIRL From KRYPTON
PART ONE: ALONE
JEPH LOEB writer
MICHAEL TURNER artist
PETER STEIGERWALD colorist
RICHARD STARKINGS letterer
The condition of the hull, the ocean floor, the absence of any barnacle or parasitic activity points to only one conclusion.
WHAT'S WRONG?
DID YOU FIND SOMETHING?
YOU FOUND SOMETHING, DIDN'T YOU!
SUPERMAN
created by JERRY SIEGEL and JOE SHUSTER
BATMAN
BOB KANE

BATMAN!
I CAN'T TELL IF YOU'RE IN JEOPARDY I'LL--
IT'S NOTHING
AND STAY OFF THIS COMM-LINK
This... space ship has not been underwater for very long. A week. Maybe two.
DO YOU WANT ME TO CALL LOIS?
WARNING!
Unauthorized
onboard craft
Either that or... someone has gone to extraordinary lengths to make it appear that way.

NOW, THAT WAS A CHEAP SHOT EVEN FROM YOU. IT WAS ONE THING TO BRING UP THE DOG...
BUT THREATENING TO TELL MY WIFE...
YOU KNOW ME.
I WILL DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO GET THE JOB DONE

The markings on the ship were Kryptonian. The font and glyphs accurate.
I have had the opportunity to study the alphabet at Superman's request.
There was not enough time to translate the message.
If someone wanted to draw me away from the crash site, they have succeeded in that regard.
My task now is to see that they regret it...
Want To See More? Be Sure To Pick Up SUPERMAN/BATMAN #8 on sale in MARCH!

JESSICA BIEL

The vampire hunter sinks her teeth into 'Blade: Trinity' and says her guns are bigger than Buffy's

WIZARD: Now that you've moved to more adult-oriented flicks like "Blade: Trinity," what's more fun: being a goody-two-shoes on "7th Heaven" or an ass-kicking vampire slayer?

BIEL: I love the action stuff; that's my favorite part of doing "Blade: Trinity." It's a blast to come to work every day and not worry about lines and actually think about choreography instead. It's completely different for me.

You're playing Abigail, the daughter of Blade's trainer and confidant, Whistler...

Abigail is Whistler's daughter, so she's really mentally strong and kind of a closed-off person because she's had all this death in her family because of the vampires. I think she feels the need to [pursue] a lot of vengeance for her family. She's more of a stoic character—she doesn't display her emotions. She's closed but incredibly smart and incredibly able, trained and deadly with her weapons. But she just does her job and moves along. She doesn't take it all in though, she just lets it all roll off of her. There are some vulnerable moments for her, but she's very stoic.

What's it like to have Kris Kristofferson playing your dad?

We never actually see Whistler and Abigail together in this movie. I never get to shoot with Kris. But they don't have a close relationship simply because he's been training Blade and she came to him when she was probably about 18 or so and said, "This is in me, this is part of my blood. I want to be part of this fight." So she's been training separately in secret, but he is her mentor. He's her hero. She puts him on a pedestal. And as the movie goes on, Abigail begins to see Blade as a father figure because all her life she's heard about Blade. And here's this guy, who her father trained for years, and knows her father better than even she does. She idolizes him.

You and Ryan Reynolds ["Van Wilder"], who plays Hannibal King, are the Nightstalkers. Any chance of a spin-off movie?

I'd definitely do a Nightstalkers movie. I think that's the plan in fact, if this movie does well, that Ryan and I will do a Nightstalkers movie. It'll be a Hannibal King and Abigail movie.

How do you and Hannibal hook up in the film? You actually save his sorry ass, don't you?

Abigail is off killing some vampires and finds Hannibal King. She saves him because he's already been turned into a vampire. She brings him into her team of people and trains him. At this point in their relationship, they're a lot like brother and sister—this is her family. It's a family of vampire hunters, but they're still a family.

> **"I would definitely do a 'Nightstalkers' movie. I think that's the plan."**
>
> JESSICA BIEL ON A SPINOFF MOVIE

I wish my family hunted vampires.

Don't we all.

Are you doing most of your own stunts?

I do almost everything myself—all the martial arts, all of our fight sequences. I haven't used a stunt double once yet. I think the only time we've needed a double is for the motorcycle riding, and that's an insurance thing. If I fall off a motorcycle, that'd be a problem. And when I have to hang upside down for a long time, we use a double then.

Hold on—can you really kick my ass? Because I don't want my ass kicked today.

Well, we train so hard with our fight trainers that we get to the point where our moves are coming together really like a dance—one flowing into the other and really moving along quickly. It's like: pow, pow, pow, pow. It's really fun when it starts becoming fluid and you start to understand the moves. It's nice to know what this kind of fighting would really do in a real life situation. It is just like a dance.

So the answer is yes, you could kick my out-of-shape ass?

Possibly. I like these old-school, raw fighting techniques. I mean, we're literally head-butting people, boxing, kicking people and kneeing them in the gut. It's old-school street-fighting. I think it's cool to come back and do some of the old-fashioned stuff. The amazing CGI technology is really, really cool, but you can't do another "Matrix." We want to make our own mark.

Okay, last question. Who wins: you or Buffy the Vampire Slayer?

Buffy is a kickass vampire slayer, let's make that clear. But with my bow and arrow? I could get her from hiding—from really far away. I think I would logically win, simply because I have guns and arrows. She might sneak up and stake me, though. She's got her martial arts, but I've got guns. ■ **MIKE COTTON**

MARVEL KNIGHTS' '4'

WIZARD EXCLUSIVE

An off-Broadway playwright and a hotshot rookie artist pull Marvel's cosmic family down to earth for a new ongoing series

BY TODD CASEY

Space may be familiar territory for the Fantastic Four, but their biggest problems may strike with their feet planted firmly on the ground.

Starting in February, newcomer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa joins forces with on-the-rise artist Steve McNiven (*Meridian*) on Marvel Knights' *4*, a down-to-earth complement to Mark Waid and Mike Wieringo's more cosmically-inclined *Fantastic Four*. Writing *4* is a shot at the moon for the playwright and longtime fan, who plans to make his mark on the classic characters by focusing more on family than fisticuffs.

"The day-to-day stuff is the context and the scale," Aguirre-Sacasa notes. "But people shouldn't think that all that's going to happen is that the FF talk about how they're going to make ends meet. That stuff is all going to be there, pervading the series, but it's the context for actual events. The characters all have very real emotional stakes in these events, be they everyday or more science fiction or supernatural."

Using the streets of New York as a backdrop, Aguirre-Sacasa plans on addressing key questions about how the risks the team takes saving the world affect their daily lives.

"If something crazy is happening, wouldn't it affect Reed and Sue's marriage?" asks Aguirre-Sacasa. "If someone had their humanity taken from them, wouldn't this affect their psychology in some way? It's asking those questions throughout, without losing the adventure, wonder and fun that [Fantastic Four creators] Stan Lee and Jack Kirby swirled around the original Fantastic Four."

While Annihilus and his minions won't be threatening the cosmos in the pages of *4*, that doesn't mean the team will be free of worry and conflict.

"There is no villain in the tradition of Dr. Doom," explains Aguirre-Sacasa. "But the FF's foundations, its base of operations, everything that enables them to be the FF gets shaken to the core. On that level, there's a huge threat."

The stories told in *4* won't tie in directly to the events going on in *Fantastic Four*. Instead, much like the relationship between *Amazing Spider-Man* and *Spectacular Spider-Man*, *4* will tell what Aguirre-Sacasa calls "alternate adventures" of the team. The first tale will see the team's entire world turned upside down when both their financial status and credibility as New York's premier superhero team come into question.

"[The story] explores the ramifications within the family," says Aguirre-Sacasa. "They have to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and figure out how they're going to fit into New York and whether they're going to have to get regular jobs. It makes them question what it means to be a hero and if only people with tons of money can be heroes."

Can't wait until *4* hits your local comic shop in February? Then take a gander at the first issue, featured here in its entirety, and see the Fantastic Four learn what it's like to work for the man!

FOUR HIRE The FF could end up unemployed and homeless in the pages of their new ongoing series.

New York.
The world's greatest city.
The Baxter Building.
Symbol of hope, heroism, and prosperity.
Fact
3,527,782 people work in New York City.
Fact
24,213 of those people work in the Baxter Building.
Fact
More than 500,000 New Yorkers eligible for employment are out of work.
Fact
The number of New York's unemployed is about to increase by...

...four.
Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday dear Frank-lin, Happy Birthday to yoooouuu!
WOO-HOO!!

Did you make a wish sweet e?
Here, Franklin, this one s from us
Now can we please go?
He s my nephew, Kourtney Chill, okay?
Hey! Whoa! Easy on the neck'--Easy, easy!
rugrats

s it a PlayStation 2 like uncle Johnny has?
A what?
I te.l you later dear

I didn't get a PlayStation 2?
Sweetie . your father has enough electronic toys for both of you. Besides.
This used to be mine My father gave it to me when I was your age.
Great.

Frank in, baby, te l your father how much you like his wagon
It's okay, Sue.
f you want, Franklin, I can take th s back and we can get you a...uhm what was t?
Yo, Stretch...

Make with the gifts later. There's a powwow happening in your study Guy wants to meet with all four of us.
Who does?
One of the suits from corporate. Jed Schultz Says it s mportant.

It's my son's *birthday*, Mr. Schultz...

And it's Saturday night. *And* Kourtney and I have tickets to "Movin' Out."

Agatha Christie would ask: What's so *wrong* that Fantastic Enterprises' Chief Financial Officer couldn't have *waited* until Monday morning?

Bad news, I'm afraid.

You're broke.

You've been following the debates in Congress? Over whether or not to cut back funding for Scientific Research and Adventuring?

The bill passed, Jed?

[illegible] night. Which means... *all* of the FF's federal funding has been revoked.

The vote was close, if that's any consolation.

It actually *is*.

Aw, *stuff* Washington. Who needs their dough? We're *rich* enough.

That's not *entirely* true, Ben.

I stayed up all night reviewing your finances, your portfolios, your stocks, your respective checking and saving accounts, and.

You're broke.

All right, we get it.

How is that possible?

A rocky market to start with, but then...

the money manager your husband hired Ms. Richards - Terry Giocometti - we think he's swindled you out of your fortune.

Terry did?

And, from all appearances, he's fled the country. Some of his other clients--Osborn Corporation, Stark Industries - have also reported mysterious losses. None so *devastating* as yours, however

I always knew that Terry guy was rotten..
How bad?
I have the exact figure here .
Your total net worth
But that's--
--chump change
As your friend and advisor, I recommend you declare bankruptcy immediately lay off your employees and start liquidating your assets.
But surely we have recourse.
I've been crunching numbers for the last seventeen hours and ..I can't think of any
Then you're not thinking hard enough.
Johnny..
You see this "4"? It means something, okay? That we're celebrities. Superheroes And superheroes do not declare bankruptcy.
That's your decision, of course, but super heroes or not, you still have debts, you still have expenses, you still pay taxes
And your point is ..?
A simple one, Mr. Storm: That you're all going to have to get jobs and start working

goodnight Squirt

Uncle Ben...?

What, Big Guy?

How come Mommy and Daddy looked so sad when everyone was leaving my party?

Well, Li'l Buddy, that's 'cause

...your mom and pop have a lot on their minds."

Valerie's already asleep, and Ben's putting Franklin to bed.

Underneath all that rock, he really *is* a softie

At least *nowadays*. You remember?

Right after we were transformed, we could barely talk to Ben he was so full of rage.

Susan--!

When I *think* of what Terry Giocometti did! That he's out there--*somewhere*--spending our money

We're too *young* to have everything taken from us. We're just *starting out*.

I know. And I'm already *implementing contingencies*.

What contingencies Reed? Contingencies that include *health insurance* for the kids? A *retirement plan* for us?

Whatever your plans are, I think we should take Jed's advice and start working. Like it or not..

"... we're all gonna have to do some growing up around here."
Let Go Runt!
You Let Go Ape!
HA!
Fine, take t' I don't need t'
Even if you could get a job you'd never keep it. You've never worked an honest day in your life--Richie Rich.
Drop dead, Ben. I'll get a job.
Oh, yeah? Doing what?
... Acting! I can go back to my acting.
Quick, somebody call Keanu Reeves and tell him to start worrying!
You listening to yer kid brother, Susie?
I'm not a part of this.

I am so over not being taken seriously!
No one likes my girlfriend- - fine, who cares? No one thinks I can act that's fine, too.
But I don't have to stand here and be insulted by some some refugee from Monster Island!
That's tough talk, but ten bucks says I come home with a job tonight and you come home with a whole lotta nothing.
You're on!
It's a bet, then.
Baby, I'm gonna drop Franklin off at school, then take Val to the park. Will you be all right here?
Of course, Susan. Why wouldn't I be?
Reed Richards.
Mr. Fantastic
Brilliant scientist.
Intrepid explorer
Stay at home dad?

I feel like I don't have *any* options, Alicia. I was *twenty years old* when we flew into the cosmic storm that gave us our powers. I never finished *college*...
Always meant to, but then I *married* Reed, and then Franklin came along
I don't have *any* regrets about my life--none at all, you *know* that--this just isn't how I imagined I'd be *facing* my *thirties*...
I never imagined I'd *be* thirty...
But you *do* have options, Sue.
The Pembrooke Academy? On the Upper West Side? Where I teach art?
They're looking for a new English teacher. Why don't we go by after lunch? I'll introduce you to the headmaster...
Oh, Alicia, I'm not *sure*...
I *should* warn you: You wouldn't be teaching Pembrooke's *regular* students, you'd be teaching the ones with--ah--*disciplinary* problems.
Uh...one second, Alicia, would you mind Valeria?

YOU.
STOP!
Field up.
SMACK!
That woman's probably somebody's grandmother. Give me one reason I shouldn't force invisible air bubbles into your bloodstream.

Here's several. I used to be an investment banker-- but I got fired. Then my wife left me Then I got evicted. I haven't eaten in a week. I can't get a job - any job.
I ran out of choices.
There are always choices.
Sue Richards.
Invisible Woman.
Mother. Wife. Super hero.
Substitute teacher?

Sue, what happened? Are you all right?
I'm fine.
And I will go see your headmaster, Alicia. I'll call Reed and have him get Franklin. I'd call Johnny--
"--but who knows where my self-involved younger brother might be."
--but you're my agent, Howard.
What can I tell ya, Johnny? Super hero endorsements have dried up. You and your family, you were overexposed.
I think you're thinking of Spider-Man.
Mattel made action figures of you guys, Johnny.
And incidentally, who's gonna pay for the scorched grass?
Forget endorsements, Howard, I want a steady acting gig with a weekly paycheck.
Maybe a soap? Or a Broadway show? I just saw "Movin' Out"...
Johnny, you're good-looking, sure, and you can fly--no one's arguing with that-- but you can't sing, you can't dance, and you can't act.
I'm good, but I'm not that good.

Come on, Howard, I need a job!
Missed
Shoot.
What you really need, kid, is a new agent
That--and to work on your character. Because let me tell you something: the world doesn't owe you anything, Mr Hot Pants.

My characters fine.

Johnny Storm.

Human Torch.

Heroic heartthrob.

Disaffected youth.

Struggling actor?

5 p.m.
BRRRWNNNGGGG!
Hey Champ, did you draw that? Can I see?
Daddy? Where's Mommy? Is she okay?
Your mother's fine, Franklin, but...
we *should* have a talk, son. Man to man.
Am I in trouble?
Of course not. Why would you ask that?
I dunno. 'Cause I didn't *like* your wagon?
Oh, Franklin, no, it's nothing like that. It's just
our family's going to be making some *changes*...
What kinda changes?
Well, to begin with

" -we're all gonna be getting new jobs."

I *wish* I could help you out, but I already got more guys than I can handle.

Look at me. Look at these *arms*. I can do the work of ten *yahoos*.

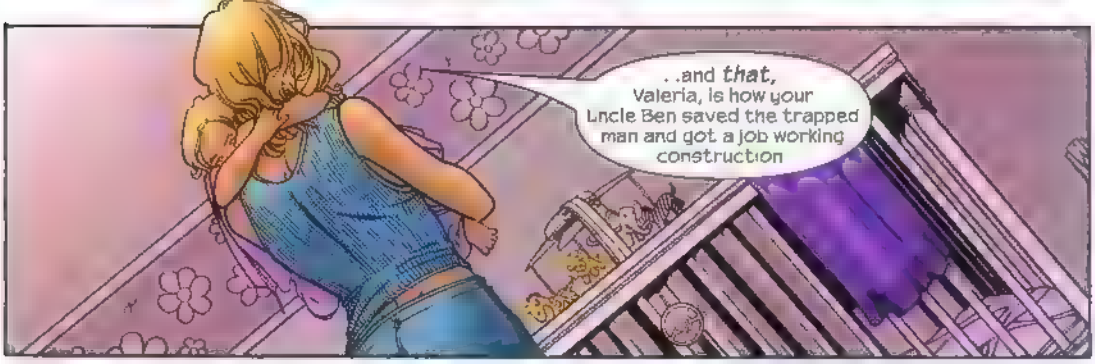
Oh, so you want I should *fire* ten of my guys so s I can *hire* you?

Guys with families, I hasten to add

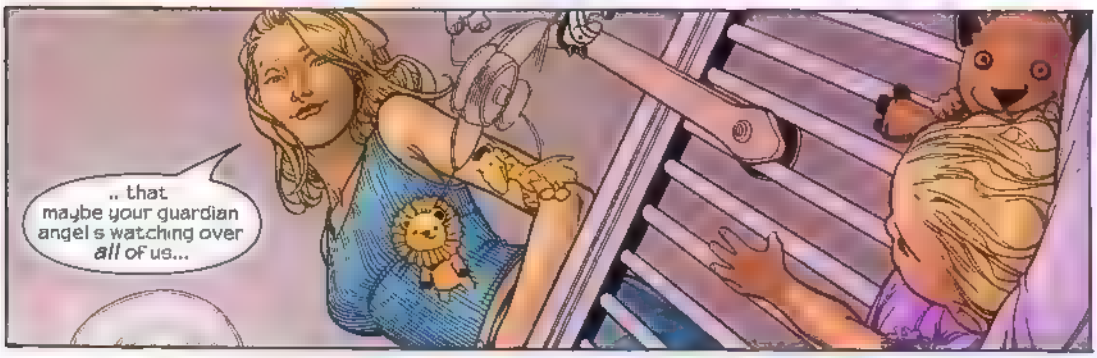
BRA-BOOM!
GET BACK! YOU'RE TOO CLOSE!
Move it,
MOVE IT!
Wha--!
KA-THOOM!

Did everyone get clear?
I d don't know, I couldn't see--
I'm counting... seven--only seven!
... Where s Danny?
He was c ose to the wall, he pushed me clear...
Danny! Can you hear me? You under there?
DANNY!
.et me

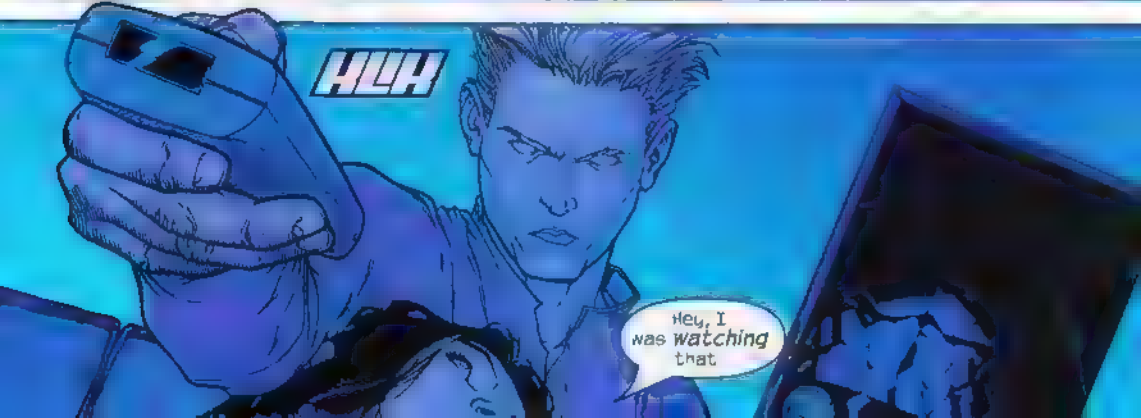
Benjamin J. Grimm
The Ever loving Blue eyed Thing
Former Test Pilot
Idol of Millions
100% Hero


..and that, Valeria, is how your Uncle Ben saved the trapped man and got a job working construction

And your Auntie Alicia helped Mommy get a job substitute teaching, which means...


.. that maybe your guardian angel s watching over all of us...

"...even your Uncle Johnny."
...and among those groups most affected by these latest cutbacks are Stark Industries, Empire State University, and of course the Fantastic--


HLK
Hey, I was watching that

Sue told me.
Don't be smug about it.
Reed? What are you doing in the dark, baby? What's wrong?
Are you still brooding about your wagon?
Everything. Everything's wrong This letter came from the mayor's office. It's real, I checked
What does he mean- "the city can no longer subsidize the reckless behavior of four non-appointed, non governmental individuals"...?
It means the federal government doesn't want to pay New York back for all the damage we've "caused" over the years

Damage as a direct result of us protecting the city!
--but the Mayor will make a deal with us. He'll forgive what we owe, if we vacate the Baxter Building and turn it over to the city.
What?
We're being evicted, baby.
Sue and Reed Richards.
Partners.
Parents.
Lovers.
Homeless?
Continued.
ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA WRITER
STEVE McNIVEN PENCILER
MARK MORALES INKER MOREY HOLLOWELL COLORIST
RANDY GENTILE LETTERER
WARREN SIMONS EDITOR AXEL ALONSO SUPERVISING EDITOR
JOE QUESADA EDITOR-IN-CHIEF DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER
SPECIAL THANKS to TERESA FOGARILE
LIKE IT?
IT GOES ON SALE
FEB. 11!

INDIANA JONESIN' From *Y* to *Runaways* to *The Hood* to *Mystique*, Brian K. Vaughan has lived his stories.

THE ADVENTURER

'Y: The Last Man' scribe Brian K. Vaughan whips up his thrill-packed stories through a life of escape, adventure and FBI surveillance

BY TODD CASEY

OPENING ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE MAYHEW AND BRIAN HABERLIN

Ash swirls outside Brian K. Vaughan's window, floating down from a crimson sky choked with thick clouds of black smoke heavy with the stench of burning leaves and timber. The conflagration consumes the centuries-old California woodland not 15 minutes from the writer's San Diego home as he suffocates inside his tightly sealed room, gazing at the blank computer screen staring back at him. And on this October day, all he can think of is: *How can I work this near-apocalyptic experience into a comic book?*

Fashioning bizarre events and experiences from his life into comic stories is nothing new to Vaughan; he does it for a living. The 27-year old writer of DC/Vertigo's *Y: The Last Man* is a self-professed bore, but a look into his adventurous lifestyle shows he's anything but.

From walking the 10th Precinct beat as a New York City auxiliary cop to hunting capuchin monkeys on a Florida safari to performing escapes from a straitjacket as a teen, Vaughan searches for stimulation and inspiration in any place he can find it—even if that means dragging his ass to the library.

"I just feel oppressively dumb," laughs the scribe, who earned his education in film at New York University. "I don't know much about things that aren't related to Boba Fett and I feel like this is sort of my graduate education to force myself to learn about the world."

Vaughan's post-collegiate street cram sessions worm their way deep into all his comics from *Runaways* to *Batman*, but these escapades took him some places even the Dark Knight wouldn't go.

WHAT HE DID: BECAME A JUNIOR CIRCUS FREAK
WHERE HE USED IT: Y: THE LAST MAN'S RESIDENT ESCAPE ARTIST YORICK BROWN

Writer's block isn't the only trap Vaughan can evade; when it comes to escapes, he could give David Blaine a run for his money.

While most of the kids in his all-boys Catholic high school in Cleveland butted heads on the gridiron, Vaughan hid under the Big Top as a member of the Circus Club, which performed to raise money for local charities.

"I'm totally uncoordinated, so I can't juggle or do anything cool," confesses Vaughan, who dabbled in everything from card tricks to levitation and even Houdini-esque escapes.

"I think I can still get out of a straitjacket under certain circumstances," reveals Vaughan. "That's not a threat by the way. So if anyone is thinking of straitjacketing me and throwing me in the nuthouse, please don't."

Vaughan shares his proclivity towards escape with Yorick Brown, the central character and sole survivor of a plague that wiped out all men in *Y: The Last Man*. Vaughan admits he based Yorick on himself—albeit a somewhat younger, more wisecracking version.

"Yorick is me a few years ago. I think you feel that you know everything when you graduate college and you're basically a d--- when you're 22—at least I was," Vaughan reflects. "Yorick has a lot of the worst attributes of me, but he's also better than me in a lot of ways—he has hair."

Hair ..and a simian sidekick.

WHAT HE DID: HUNTED MONKEYS IN FLORIDA
WHERE HE USED IT: AMPERSAND, Y: THE LAST MAN'S LAST MALE MONKEY ON EARTH

While he never ducked into a lesbian bar to experience the feel of being a lone man in a world of women (or so he claims), Brian Vaughan put an enormous amount of research beyond his own experiences into his ambitious creator-owned series.

"I really spent like two years thinking about Y," recalls Vaughan. "Every person I would meet, I would think, 'Let's remove all the men from this situation and [consider] what would happen to this person.'"

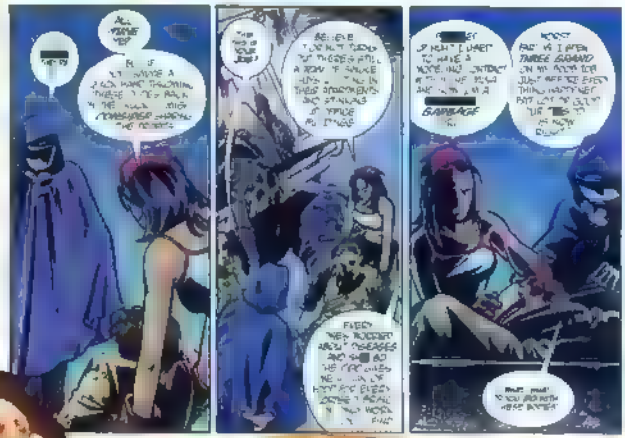
Yanking the men out of the picture set the stage for some intriguing storytelling possibilities, but Vaughan decided to take it a step further and ponder: *What would happen to the last male monkey?*

Writing snappy dialogue for a character based on yourself is one thing, but what does one plug into the word balloons coming out of the mouth of a feisty, diapered helper monkey?

While the easy answer would be to plop in an "Eee! Eee!" every once in a while and hope chimp expert Jane Goodall doesn't ride your ass about it, Vaughan decided to get a little more ambitious

Around Christmastime 2001, with his fiancée in tow, Vaughan headed to Florida's "Monkey Jungle" to track down a living, screeching capuchin monkey so he could hear firsthand the kinds of hoots and hollers it made.

"I searched around for about three hours," recollects Vaughan, whose near-obsession with getting facts right proved his undoing in this case. "When I finally found one, I got out my tape recorder and stood underneath it trying to coax it into saying something, but it just pissed on me and took off."



WHAT HE DID: JOINED NEW YORK CITY'S FINEST AS AN AUXILIARY COP
WHERE YOU SAW IT: VAUGHAN'S SORDID MARVEL/MAX VILLAIN TALE THE HOOD

Vaughan's endeavor into crime research didn't end a urine-soaked fiasco; it just kept him walking streets that smelled like it.

"I try to get out there and force myself into some sort of weird adventure every once in a while," admits Vaughan, who decided he could amp up his stories of seedy streets and misdeeds with a little real life experience. Rather than pledging to the local Crips or Bloods chapter, he decided the best way to learn about the crime world was to become a New York City auxiliary cop

"He's pretty knowledgeable about police activities and things like that," notes *Y: The Last Man* artist Pia Guerra. "The first time I met him he was wearing his uniform shirt and I thought, 'Oh

STRAIT UP While Vaughan can escape from a straitjacket, we doubt he's ever met a corpse-collecting ex-model.

that's so cool, he's got a little NYPD shirt!' and then I realized, 'Oh, that's his real uniform!'"

The endeavor won him a position on the force from 1999-2001 and the potential for some great Batman stories, but as it turned out, without being able to carry a firearm, the deadliest weapon against crime in his utility belt was his police-issue radio.

"I never had to cuff anyone," Vaughan admits. "If it ever looked like there was anything dangerous going on, I would just hide and get on my radio to call for real cops to come and handle it." While the training taught him a lot about law and self-defense that he was later able to incorporate into *The Hood* mini-series, the experience itself was somewhat lacking.

"All I did was stand in the street and wave construction trucks through," he laughs. "So that was pretty extraordinary and harrowing."

WHAT HE DID: WORKED IN A MENTAL HOSPITAL
WHERE YOU SAW IT: ISSUES OF VAUGHAN'S SWAMP THING SERIES AND THE MAD HATTER IN THE RECENT DETECTIVE COMICS #787

Being a cop wasn't all it was cracked up to be, but when it came to Vaughan's experience at St. Vincent's Hospital, "cracked" was surely the operative word.

"It wasn't like 'Silence of the Lambs' with Miggs throwing semen at me," jokes Vaughan, who took on the job to help support himself while penning his earliest comic scripts for DC and Marvel. "I was essentially a glorified audio/visual nerd, but every once in a while they needed people to come in and videotape students having their first interactions with the patients. That was pretty good grist for the mill, especially working at Vertigo."

One such session he caught on tape in 1998 involved a man with partial amnesia who had no idea who he was or how he wound up seated staring into Vaughan's camera.

"I got to videotape them giving him a sodium pentothal injection, which is truth serum—like in the old WWII Nazi movies," describes Vaughan, adding that the quick-acting sedative is meant to jog the patient's memory. "As soon as they did it, the guy started to remember things. That was crazy to sit in on—that's like science fiction!"

Swamp Thing never got sodium pentothal pumped into its roots during Vaughan's run on the book in 2000 (Vaughan based most of the characters on patients he'd encountered), but the writer's experience at St. Vincent's was the basis for his Mad Hatter story in *Detective Comics* #787.

"Very few people who have mental illnesses are violent. If anything, they are violent to themselves," Vaughan explains of his decision to base the tale around the Mad Hatter and Lewis Carroll's nonsensical poem "Jabberwocky." "I wanted to do a story about mental illness that wasn't just, 'Look! I'm the Joker and I'm crazy and evil!'"

WHAT HE DID: DOVE DEEP INTO THE WORLD OF GERM WARFARE
WHERE HE USED IT: THE INSIDIOUS PLOTS OF MYSTIQUE'S AND Y: THE LAST MAN'S VILLAINS

Sometimes hands-on research doesn't do the trick—or it's illegal—in which case Vaughan is forced to hit the books, but even that becomes an adventure when taboo subjects threaten to land the scribe in his own padded cell.

"While I was still living in Brooklyn, I was doing research for *Y: The Last Man* at the library and I had a big list of things I wanted to explore," recounts Vaughan, who was in the process of plotting issue #3 of the series that sees Yorick trying to escape from the White House panic room where his mother is trying to protect him from the plague, as well as the women hunting him down. "I remember being exhausted—and I just look so creepy when I leave the house because I'm an unshaven, pasty white hermit—and I stumbled into the library and said to the librarian, 'Hi, um, I need books on infectious diseases and a schematic of the White House.'"

The suspicious librarian's terse rejection of his Al-Qaeda-like request made him realize he's surely been red-flagged for CIA or FBI terrorist filings. "Everything I research is about crazy, evil things," admits Vaughan. "'How do I blow this up, how do I kill this guy, how do I blackmail this guy'—and in the John Ashcroft world, I'm sure someone is keeping their eye on me."

But if Vaughan goes down, he's definitely taking Pia Guerra with him.

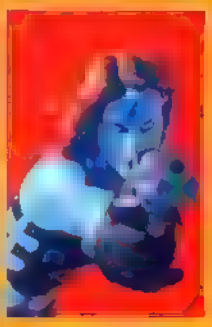
HATTERS AND HOTTIES From working in an asylum to researching terrorists, Vaughan's adept at adding realism to his tales.

"I have so many pictures of the Israeli army and the White House that I'm surprised a van hasn't pulled up to take me away!" laughs Guerra, who got a crash course in Vaughan's street education from the notes and links to photo reference on the Web in his scripts.

"I know every gun in existence now," she reveals. "Kalashnikov, HK, Mag, the SAM Missile launcher—every gun you can think of!"

IMMINENT ESCAPADES

A sneak peek at Brian K. Vaughan's titles in 2004



(Marvel)

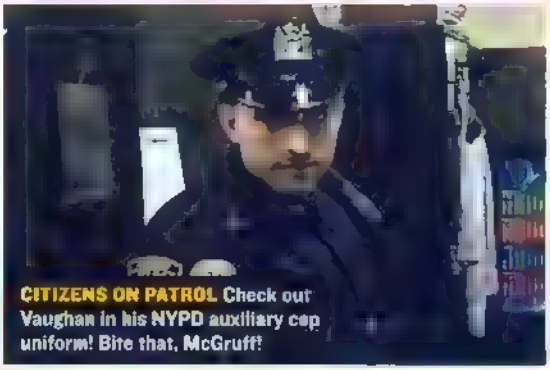
Vaughan (along with artist Michael Ryan) concludes the sultry shapeshifter's fight to save humanity from a mutant form of smallpox in January's issue #10. February's issue #11 starts a two-part storyarc where Mystique and Forge play hide n' seek in the writer's old New York City stomping grounds. "Following that," divulges Vaughan, "The identity of the Quiet Man will finally be revealed, and we'll see who is pulling Mystique's strings. Is she working for Xavier, the Quiet Man or herself?"

(Marvel)

In January's issue #10, Vaughan and artist Adrian Alphona take the Runaways and their new member Topher into a hardcore battle with their parents—but not everyone will make it out alive! For the next arc, Vaughan finally gets a shot at writing Cloak and Dagger after having Marvel reject pitches he made while in college—pitches that, according to Vaughan, "Every young writer has to write at least three of." Marvel's original runaways will appear in a two-part arc beginning in February's issue #11 when they're hired to track down the Runaways.

(DC/Vertigo)

The three-part "Safeword" arc kicks off in January's issue #18. After being knocked unconscious and drugged by a mysterious foe, the last man wakes up to find himself forcefully bound by a dominatrix! This is one idea that's definitely not from Vaughan's personal experience—this was all from the mind of artist Pia Guerra. "What better nemesis for an escape artist than a master of bondage?" asks Guerra, who came up with the idea after seeing a demonstration of the complex "Shibari" rope bondage while attending a comic convention. "Instead of doing the typical leather and candle-wax stuff, I wanted to do Shibari because it's gorgeous to draw." And impossible to escape—good luck, Yorick! TC



CITIZENS ON PATROL Check out Vaughan in his NYPD auxiliary cop uniform! Bite that, McGruff!

WHAT HE DID: RAN FOR PRESIDENT AS A REALITY SHOW CONTESTANT
WHERE YOU WILL SEE IT: MARCH'S EX MACHINA SERIES FROM WILDSTORM/DC'S CLIFFHANGER IMPRINT

Vaughan's presence on the FBI's most wanted list might hinder any hope he had for a political career, but that didn't stop him from giving it a shot.

The premise for *Ex Machina*, which features art by Tony Harris (*Starman*), revolves around a superhero running for mayor of New York City and winning—a premise he assures did not come from cyborg-hero Arnold Schwarzenegger's gubernatorial election in California, but rather, his own election experience.

"Two years ago, there was this reality show called 'Candidate 2012,'" explains Vaughan, who admits he's always had delusions of grandeur. "The idea was to pick someone to groom for the Presidency and follow their life and campaign up to the 2012 election, so I submitted a tape with an explanation of how many bald presidents there have been and that being bald shouldn't stop me from being allowed to run."

When it came to the finals, Vaughan was still in the running, a fact that he feels led to the HBO show's cancellation. "Surely if they were left with someone like me as a finalist," he laughs, "they just decided to cancel. But in some alternate universe out there, there's a TV show about Brian Vaughan running for president."

WHAT'S TO COME?

Barring another calamitous natural disaster threatening his San Diego abode or the possible reinstatement of "Candidate 2012," 2004 promises to be a demanding year of writing for Vaughan.

"The more you write, the more you get stuck inside your room," confesses Vaughan, "which I think is a danger because then you start writing about books you've read or things you've seen on TV instead of the life you've led."

After more than a decade of wild adventures, will the coming year's hectic writing schedule mean it's time to hang up the straitjacket? Not if Vaughan can help it.

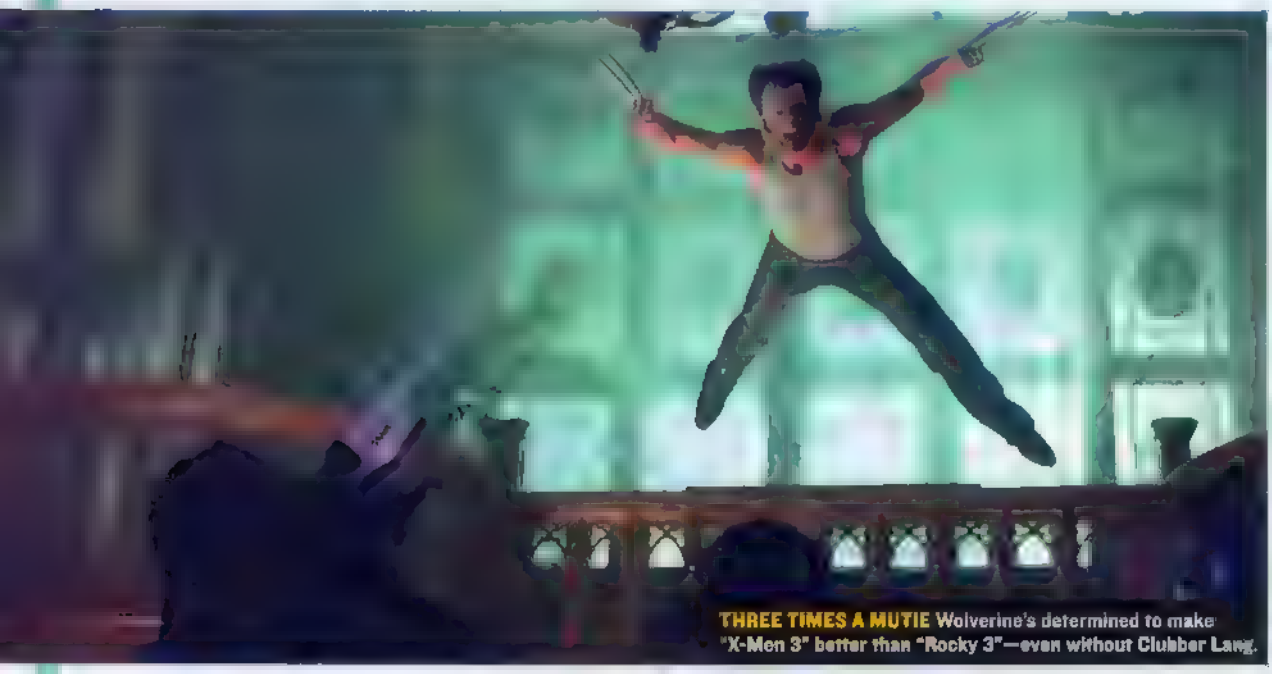
"I think I'm going out to try and find some illegal street racing," muses the scribe, whose 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. writing sessions are frequently disturbed by the roar of souped-up engines. "You can hear these interceptor engines revving and people screaming, but by the time you're able to triangulate where the noise is coming from, everyone has disappeared," he laments. "I have yet to find it, but it's not from lack of trying."

Staff Writer Todd Casey is living proof that you can be kicked out of Monkey Jungle for throwing your own poop.

MEGA

MUTANTS MARCH ON

Bryan Singer and company already prepping for 'X-Men 3'



THREE TIMES A MUTIE Wolverine's determined to make "X-Men 3" better than "Rocky 3"—even without Clubber Lang.

"The Dark Phoenix Saga," "Power of Proteus," "Days of Future Past"—you just might see elements of one or more of these classic X-tales in a third X-Men film.

While fans may still be playing "X2" on DVD over and over again, there's already speculation among fans and talk among the principal players about "X-Men 3," which would re-team director Bryan Singer ("The Usual Suspects") with his merry mutants.

Singer has said that he's interested in working on the film despite not being contracted to direct it. There may not be any concrete plans for a third film yet, but the talk surrounding the follow-up to "X2" has already started mutating Hollywood brains with ideas.

"I think Bryan and everyone else are eager to start on the next chapter, but when it will actually happen is anyone's guess," says "X2" co-writer Michael Dougherty. "There are lots of logistical issues to figure out with a cast this big, and that will take time. All good things to those who wait."

Signing a cast of actors—including Hugh Jackman as Wolverine, Ian McKellen as Magneto, Patrick Stewart as Professor Xavier as well as a number of other actors—is no small feat, but Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, who plays the shapeshifting Mystique in the films, reveals she's ready to come back for a third film as soon as the rest of the cast comes together.

"At the premiere for 'X2', [Executive Producer] Tom DeSanto came over and told me some ideas that they were already kicking around for 'X3,' and he told me some ideas that he had for my storyline in 'X3'," says Stamos. "And I was really, really excited but I can't share [the details]. I can't tell! And also, things change everyday. But I know that they are developing it. I know that they are in the middle of writing it. I just saw Bryan Singer actually three nights ago. We didn't really talk about it much but we're all excited to get into it again."

While Anna Paquin (Rogue) and Shawn Ashmore (Iceman) are both contracted for what looks to be the final act of the "X-Men" trilogy, Ashmore expects the entire cast to return.

"It's a big cast to get together," the 24-year-old star told sources. "But I think it's pretty much everybody coming back. I can't wait to find out what the story is this time."

Jackman, who rocketed to stardom after his initial appearance as Wolverine in the original 2000 "X-Men" film, says he's dedicated to re-teaming with the X-Men team if for no other reason than to see how his character's story progresses—even if a third film isn't planned for release until 2006.

"Well, it will be a few years off, but I am tied to the character of Wolverine and really do want to know how his story progresses," Jackman told sources. "You know, I owe a lot

More X-Men...

COMICS For the scoop on Marc Silvestri's return to the X-Men, go to p. 28!

TOYS Check out the latest X-Men Minimates coming soon from Diamond Select/Art Asylum on p. 119!

WOLVERINE, MYSTIQUE, FOX, CAINE, STEVE ORANITZ/WIREIMAGE.COM, PUNISHER, ARTISAN

ROMIJN-STAMOS AS MYSTIQUE

"We're all excited to get into it again."

REBECCA ROMIJN-STAMOS ON RETURNING FOR "X-MEN 3"

to Wolverine, and I love working with Bryan Singer and Pat Stewart and Ian McKellen and the guys, so I'd be silly to throw it all away, so yes when they are ready, I'm there." In addition, both McKellen and James Marsden (Cyclops) have stated publicly that they'd return for a third film, while Halle Berry (Storm) could possibly return if her character factors into the story more

Since the first "X-Men" film fans have begged to see the mutant-hunting Sentinels and with the cliffhanger ending from "X2," which introduced Jean Grey's Phoenix powers but ended with her sacrificing her life to save the team, fans and Hollywood bigwigs have to admit the possibilities are endless for another sequel to the "X-Men" franchise

"We've been working on the 'X2' DVD and we're very excited about that," says Marvel Studios Vice President Kevin Feige "But ["X3"] is a big task. There's lots of scheduling to be addressed and once all that falls into place, we're going to, without a doubt, take a trip to see what the merry mutants are up to." ■ **MIKE COTTON, WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY JESSE THOMPSON**

TRAILERS...

CAINE

BATMAN According to sources at Warner Bros., Michael Caine ("Austin Powers in Goldmember") has signed on to play Batman's trusted butler Alfred in director Christopher Nolan's upcoming "Batman" film, alongside Bat-star Christian Bale ("American Psycho").

BATMAN ANIMATED Rumor has it voice casting is already under way for the new Cartoon Network series.

CATWOMAN Halle Berry's alter ego's name has changed from Patience Price to Patience Philips.

CONSTANTINE Producer Lauren Schuler-Donner has said that the film's storyline will be loosely based on writer Garth Ennis' 1994 "Dangerous Habits" *Hellblazer* story

FANTASTIC FOUR "We should have a director attached early in the year," says Marvel Studios Vice President Kevin Feige The tentative release date has been moved from Christmas 2004 to summer 2005.

GHOST RIDER The film should be moving into production in early spring, according to Feige.

IRON MAN "We expect to read the revised draft by ['Smallville' scribes Miles] Millar and [Alfred] Gough over Christmas," says Feige. Production should begin after January 1.

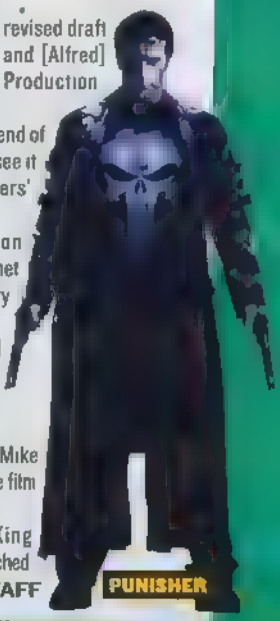
MAN THING "It's on course for an end of August '04 release," says Feige "We see it succeeding with that 'Jeepers Creepers' kind of positioning "

NICK FURY Samuel L. Jackson ("S.W.A.T.") has told sources that he met with Marvel about playing an updated Fury on the big screen.

PUNISHER "Punisher is wrapped and looks great," says Feige. "The next trailer will be more story-oriented and show some of the other characters."

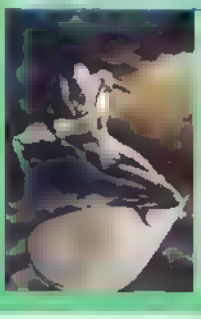
WAKE THE DEAD "X2" scribe Mike Dougherty will pen the screenplay for the film based on the Steve Niles IDW series.

WONDER WOMAN Jaime King ("Bulletproof Monk") is rumored to be attached to the lead role. ■ **THE WIZARD STAFF**


PUNISHER

NAKED GUY OF THE MONTH

SILVER SURFER



"You're going to start hearing a lot about Silver Surfer," promises Marvel Studios VP Kevin Feige. "It'll be our next big project with Fox after 'Fantastic Four.' We're excited about jumping into it for the same reasons every college kid in the '60s and '70s was reading it. It's a hard-core science fiction, philosophical, adventure movie. Silver Surfer's going to kick some ass in the next two or three years."

MAN OF TOMORROW TODAY

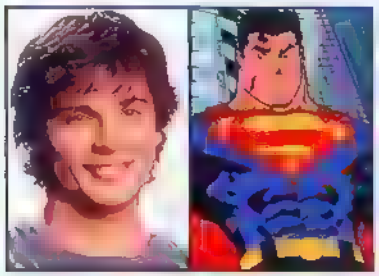
WIZARD runs down the plot and cast for the ultimate Superman trilogy

The Man of Steel? More like the Man of Stall

It's been nearly two decades since comic's biggest icon graced the silver screen, and we're getting impatient! New rumors come flying out of Hollywood every day as the buzz surrounding the planned Superman movie grows to a raucous din. To kill some time, we picked our ideal cast and outline for the rumored trilogy of Superman films that would join the ranks of "Lord of the Rings," "The Matrix" and the original "Star Wars" as one of the greatest cinematic epics of all time.

WELL RED Imagine Tom Welling as a red Kryptonite-infected Superman and then call us crazy.

CASTING CALL



SUPERMAN/CLARK KENT: TOM WELLING Is there any other choice? Not only is the 26-year-old "Smallville" star the perfect age to play the Man of Steel, but he's been playing him for three years! From doe-eyed innocence to the red Kryptonite-affected "Evil Clark," Welling has shown he's got the range to pull off Supes.

LOIS LANE: SELMA BLAIR Not only is she a smokin' hot brunette (a clutch Lois Lane requisite), but as she demonstrates in films like "The Sweetest Thing," Blair can pull off the assertive, "don't-take-crap from-nobody" attitude Lane is known for. Plus, she's already expressed interest in the role!

LEX LUTHOR: ED NORTON Norton can vividly portray an outright wicked guy ("Primal Fear," "American History X") but can be devious and sly at the same time ("The Italian Job"). Additionally, his years of experience would play off of Welling's big-screen freshness for an intriguing Lex-Superman dynamic

BRAINIAC: HUGO WEAVING Nobody can do a machine-minded madman like Agent Smith ("The Matrix"). He has the perfect monotone delivery for an unfeeling being that wants the destruction of mankind, and his explosive brawl with Neo in "Matrix: Revolutions" was right out of *Action Comics!*

Agree? Disagree? Send us your casting tips and dream stories: magicwords@wizarduniverse.com ■ THE WIZARD

THE FLICKS

SUPERMAN Fresh out of college, Clark arrives in Metropolis for a "Superman: Year One" story that would show his first time donning the costume, his initial encounter with Lois Lane at the *Daily Planet* and the first time the world says, "Look! Up in the sky!" The first foe he trades blows with? A Luthor-funded Superman clone: Bizarro!

SUPERMAN 2 The public is comfortable with their gallant hero, but the tides change when the world is invaded by Brainiac and word gets out that Superman is an alien, too! Aside from a special effects blowout that would rival "The Matrix," the film would touch on deeper themes of xenophobia and racism as Superman fights to save a planet that scorns him

SUPERMAN 3 When a ruthless vigilante super-team emerges under the auspices of Lexcorp (reminiscent of *Action Comics* #775), it's up to Superman to stop them from killing innocents as they wage a high-casualty war on crime. Superman proves that he's a tried and true hero when he takes them all out without taking a life. Lex lands in the slammer, and Clark reveals his secret to his fiancée Lois Lane for the tight wrap-up.

HELL HEATS UP

More images from the set of 'Hellboy'!

The countdown begins! With only three months to go before the April 2 premiere of "Hellboy," *Wizard* stokes the flames of fan anticipation for director Guillermo del Toro's upcoming blockbuster with a brand new batch of exclusive images from Sony!

Hellboy gets an unwanted hand from a slimy monster in a dark alleyway (1). And judging by the look on Hellboy's face, that monster's in for a one helluva beating! Speaking of hands...if you're gonna stick yours into trouble (and lots of broken glass), you damn well better have the Right Hand of Doom (2), which also comes in handy when falling off buildings (3). Finally, Hellboy proves that both his hands are ready for action in this extra-packed subway scene (4). ■ **RICHARD HO**

1

2

3

4

DVD BUZZ...

BABYLON 5 SEASON 4 This six-disc set includes all 22 episodes from round four of *Amazing Spider-Man* scribe J. Michael Straczynski's sci-fi series. (Jan. 6)

COMIC BOOK: THE MOVIE Mark Hamill writes, directs and stars in this intriguing mockumentary revolving around a filmmaker (Hamill) hired to hang out at cons and cover his favorite superheroes of all time. The disc includes interviews with Kevin Smith, Bruce Campbell, Stan "The Man" Lee and tons more. (Jan. 27)

KAIJU BIG BATTEL

FREDDY VS. JASON The disc to this blissful franchise marriage includes commentary with director Ronny Yu, Robert Englund and Ken Kirzinger (the gloved and masked one, respectively), deleted scenes, music videos and more. (Jan. 13)

JEREMIAH SEASON 1 Who walks hand-in-hand on our post-apocalyptic planet? Would you believe Dylan McKay from "90210" and Theo Huxtable? (And this is produced by J. Michael Straczynski, to boot!) This six-disc box set includes commentary, deleted scenes and production sketches. (Jan. 20)

KAIJU BIG BATTEL Straight from the successful live-action shows starring guys in rubber suits, Americans can now enjoy watching these cuddly killers obliterate cities with their battle royal. The 60-minute disc has a trailer for the actual live-event and a "What is Kaiju?" history lesson. (December)

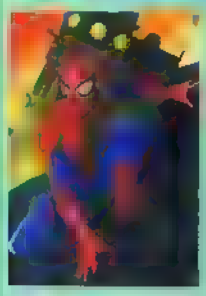
THE SHIELD SEASON 2 Brian Michael Bendis' evil twin plays both sides of the law in this acclaimed police drama. In addition to all of the season's uncut episodes, the four-disc set includes commentary and 38 deleted scenes. (Jan. 6)

UNDERWORLD War is hell; especially when it involves vampires and werewolves. This monstrously packed disc includes three different commentary tracks, storyboard to scene comparison, and (best of all) a leather-clad Kate Beckinsdale (left). *Serendipity* this ain't. (Jan. 13)

■ WALTER ORSINI

THE SUPERHERO OF THE MONTH

SPIDER-MAN: ANIMATED CHRONICLES SEASON 1



Face it, tiger. You're going to drop the 10 bones to watch old webhead lay the smack down on Doc Ock this summer. Aren't you a little curious who he's been sparring with for a warm-up? Taking place between the original "Spider-Man" and the upcoming sequel to the blockbuster film, MTV's computer-animated series has Parker wailing on Electro, macking it to Mary Jane and finishing his Calculus homework all within half-hour installments. Spidey-sense tingling yet? How about a two-disc set with a blooper reel, a photo gallery and music and post-production featurettes? (Jan. 13)

BATTING ORDER

How Christian Bale preps for 'Batman'

Since the next "Batman" film is at least a year away, new Bat-guy Christian Bale has some time to get into the head of his character. Here are 10 ways that the "Reign of Fire" star is preparing for the guano life

SALE

10. Ask Matthew McConaughey to play Robin, enlist fire-breathing dragon as Alfred

9. Gather TV monitors, a dinosaur and a giant penny, toss it all in basement, call it "the cave"

8. Brooding. Lots of brooding.

7. To prepare to work with "Memento" director Christopher Nolan, live life backwards

6. Make a "Bale-Signal" out of duct tape and a flashlight

5. Ask for a restraining order against Joel Schumacher

4. Keep secrets from whatever girl he's dating at the moment, get dumped because of secrets, then use mysterious-secret vibe to reel in another girl. Repeat.

3. Refuse to return "advice"-giver Adam West's phone calls

2. ...but try desperately to get Halle Berry's phone number (to keep things "in continuity")

1. Add "no nipple" clause to contract ■ THE WIZARD STAFF

HALO THERE Master Chief will have his hands full against the Covenant in *Halo 2*.

SEQUEL OPPORTUNITY

WIZARD targets the five video game franchises to watch in 2004

Walking down any aisle at your local video game shop can send most fans into eye-candy overload. Considering the thousands of games that are smacked onto shelves every year, it's a surprise any title can get a foothold in the market. First-person shooters, RPGs and horror are just some of the genres gamers will be bombarded with when looking to spend some cash. But don't fret; we're here to help you wade through the crap and whet your appetite for some of the hottest gaming franchises making heir return to the market with the most anticipated releases of 2004.

HALO 2 (Xbox)
Microsoft
Early 2004

Over two years after launching in conjunction with the Xbox itself, the original *Halo* is still getting tons of action. Gamers quickly became addicted to the balanced combat, blasting away into the wee hours of the morning, and the recent PC release helps to further that vice by including online play. Now the sequel will delve deeper into the clash between genetically enhanced super soldier Master Chief and the nasty alien scum that is the Covenant, and may introduce an even more venomous race. "Our *Halo* franchise has redefined the shooter category with innovation, great gameplay and pure fun," boasted Ed Fries, vice president of Xbox Game Content at Microsoft Game Studios. "*Halo 2* will build on its legacy with awesome new features and the thrill of playing anyone, anywhere using Xbox Live."

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER (PS2)
Konami
Fall 2004

Military badass Solid Snake doesn't seem to be satisfied with having coined the much-copied genre known as stealth action. In his third outing (not counting the classic NES games), *Snake Eater*, the sneaky soldier of fortune finds himself in a 1960s adventure, which is primed to redefine the word "freedom." Rather than plop him in an industrial environment full of dreary cinder blocks and cement, creator/director Hideo Kojima opted for a Tarzan-like approach, letting the player wander about virtually anywhere while attempting to thwart plans of Cold War deviance. Thus, Snake will don camouflage and make his way through a lush jungle, using new skills like tree-climbing to surprise enemies. Sorry, no loincloths.

KINGDOM HEARTS 2 (PS2)
Square-Enix
Fall 2004

By merging the magical world of Disney with edgy,

SORA

Final Fantasy-type designs, *Kingdom Hearts* proved to be one of the most engaging—albeit odd—jaunts of 2002. In this epic sequel, the adventure continues promptly after the events that unfolded in the original, picking up with the exploits of Sora, Kairi and Riku—and their cartoon pals like Mickey, Goofy and Donald, of course. While not much has been revealed about the game's plot, Square-Enix will follow the same template, tapping into even more of Disney's huge archive of animated classics to craft an array of unique worlds to explore. "Our development team is determined to deliver an even more unique and exciting gaming experience that will appeal to the global marketplace," said Tetsuya Nomura, director and main character designer.

DOOM III (Xbox, PC)
Activision
Spring 2004

It's been a while since gamers have taken a trek through hell, but you'd better buy some suntan lotion for this *Doom* update. Aside from being one of the most detailed first-person shooters ever created—encompassing everything from ultra-realistic corpse physics to the way the smoke from the barrel of your gun sways depending on the direction you're moving—the new multiplayer functionality is what has most gamers buzzing. "Everyone knows that *DOOM III* is the most terrifying and scary single player experience ever created," gushed Todd Hollenshead, CEO, id Software. "Multiplayer delivers the intense competitive action that our fans can count on."

GRAN TURISMO 4 (PS2)
Sony
Spring 2004

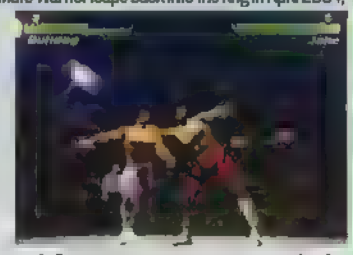
If someone put a screenshot of *Gran Turismo 4* next to a photograph, it would be nearly impossible to tell the difference. That's the striking amount of detail that developer Polyphony Digital has put into the ultimate racing simulation—so excruciatingly crafted that the team actually short-circuited dozens of digital cameras while taking millions of reference photos. "In *Gran Turismo 4*, automotive racing is much more than a sport—it is a lifestyle, as we take advantage of the successful game mechanics of its predecessor and present an even more in-depth racing experience," said Ami Blaire, director of product marketing for Sony Computer Entertainment America. "With its cutting-edge technology and enhanced online mode, we are confident that *GT4* will meet the demand of our fans and automotive enthusiasts." ■ **JON M. GIBSON**

HOT WHEELS The *Gran Turismo 4* team went for a heavy dose of realism with the sequel.

VIDEO GAME RUMBLINGS

DEAD AGAIN Jack Slate and Shadow are back, and the gritty underworld of Grant City is their playground in the sequel to Namco's award-winning third-person action game *Dead to Rights*. Scheduled for a fall 2004 release on PS2 and Xbox, *Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay* breaks new ground with innovative gameplay mechanics including a 360-degree brawling system, melee weapon battles and a spherical slow motion diving system. The story? Jack and his K9 partner mix it up with competing criminal organizations battling for supremacy in the scummy depths of Grant City.

ULTIMATE COMEBACK Wrestling fans, get ready for the return of a legend! The Ultimate Warrior leaps back into the ring in April 2004, courtesy of Acclaim's *Legends of Wrestling: Showdown* on all next-generation platforms. Over 70 professional wrestlers will appear in the game—but none more anticipated that the former WWE champion. The appearance marks the Warrior's first ring stint in seven years—and we're betting his gorilla press hasn't lost a step!

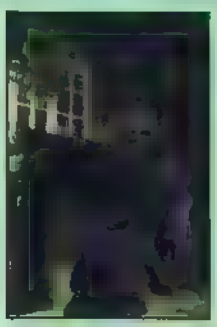


MORE RAYNE Not only is the sultry vampire making the leap to the big screen, but Majesco has just announced that a video game sequel to the popular *Bloodrayne* title is in the works as well. Scheduled for an October release, *Bloodrayne 2* for PS2, Xbox and PC will star the sexy half-vampire as she hunts down her own brothers and sisters in an effort to protect humanity from the vicious plans of her evil father, Kagan. Look for new gameplay mechanics like pole combat, rail sliding and kickass fatality moves.

BOND, DIGITAL BOND Need two reasons to check out EA's upcoming original Bond release, *James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing*? How about Shannon Elizabeth and Heidi Klum? The buxom babes are the newest ladies to join the pantheon of Bond girls—and the first to be introduced in a video game! Set for a February release, *Everything or Nothing* features a brand new third-person perspective that shows off the detailed digital likeness of Pierce Brosnan himself, along with a movie-quality original story.

RUMBLING OF THE MONTH

SOCOM'S OPENING SALVO



The first *SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals* broke the online barrier and was widely considered the number one online console game available. It's just been bested—by its own sequel. In the first two days after its release in November, *SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs* knocked off its predecessor with more than 22,000 simultaneous players during the first 48 hours. The Sony Computer Entertainment title features extensive online support, 16-player battles complete with voice and text communication and a sophisticated stat-tracking system. And with the most detailed fighting experience ever created, *SOCOM II* gets you as close to actual combat as you'll ever get!

GAMES WE WANNA SEE

SMALLVILLE

THE SHOW Who would've thought that a teen drama would be the perfect way to tell the story of Superman's younger days? Now in its third season, "Smallville" continues to be a success for the WB and DC. Thanks to a cast of unknowns, along with cool new twists on classic characters and storylines, it's easy to see how the show has risen to become one of the highest-rated dramas on television.

THE GAME Considering the show's overall mood and focus on character development, the role-playing genre would probably work best here. In a setting where *Final Fantasy* meets *Metal Gear Solid*, a *Smallville* game would be high on plot development with flurries of cool action, just like the show. And instead of a linear storyline, young Clark Kent would have to choose from different paths and make some tough decisions through plenty of plot twists. The RPG element of the game would also make it possible for the cast to voice the characters and act out cut scenes in person, while the gameplay could coincide with events taking place on the show, including new video game-exclusive characters.

JUST IMAGINE... A scenario where Clark has to decide how far he's willing to go to protect his adopted parents and friends, while resisting the temptation to put on his Red Kryptonite ring would ultimately lead to a showdown with Lionel Luthor. But he also has to watch out for the other Luthor—Lionel's son, Lex. After grabbing hold of some Green Kryptonite, the usually friendly Lex, tantalized by his newfound power and influence, begins to torment Clark

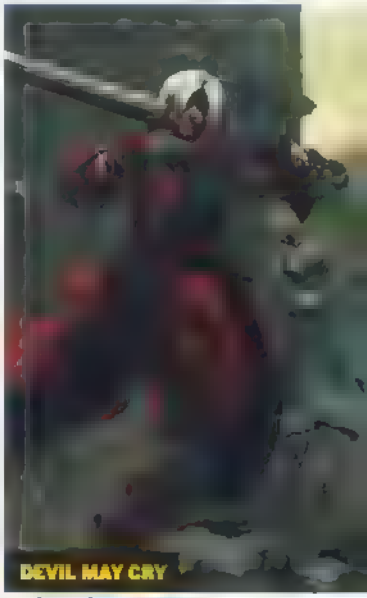
REALITY BYTE The ratings could go through the roof, but it would still be unlikely that a game based on the show would hit the shelves. Then again, with DC's Superman comics revealing more and more ties to "Smallville" continuity, a game in the future isn't totally out of the question.

■ TED KRITSONIS

DEVIL OF A TIME

Comic to adapt 'Devil May Cry' game

Artist Pat Lee and writer Brad Mick are going to give the Devil his due when Dreamwave kicks off the next of its video game comic titles from Capcom, *Devil May Cry*. The March-shipping four-issue limited series will loosely chronicle demonic hero Dante's adventures from the first *Devil May Cry* video game. Staying true to the character, the mercenary will be shooting and slashing his way through legions of supernatural scum with his trademark twin hand cannons and massive blade. *Wizard* caught up with Lee for the low-down on the new series.



DEVIL MAY CRY

WIZARD: What made you choose *Devil May Cry* as your next project? Were you a fan of the game?

LEE: Absolutely. The game is seriously intense with gorgeous designs. I love the epic feel, especially when you first begin and you enter this huge castle on an island. After solving it, I just wanted more

What makes the game a good candidate to become a comic book?

I love the dark atmosphere and felt it would translate extremely well into comics with a digitally painted style. It will be the very first book that I work on where the entire series is digitally painted. We had to start the project way in advance since it takes much more time to paint the book

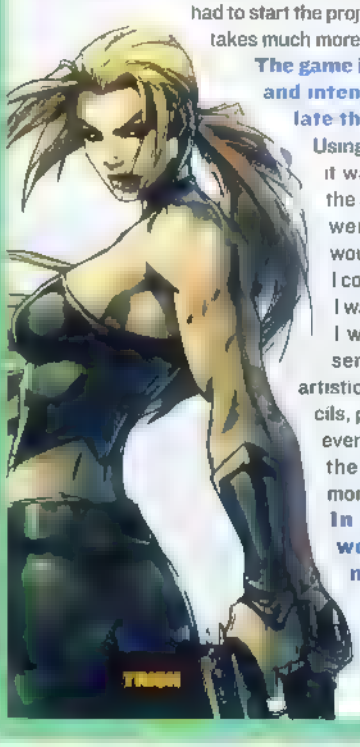
The game is pretty action-packed and intense, how did you translate that onto the page?

Using our coloring techniques, it was a mix match between the artists to pull it off. There were some panels where I wouldn't even pencil it so that I could add a specific feel that I wanted through Photoshop. I want to give this book a sense of diversity from an artistic perspective, using pencils, paint, digital paint, maybe even charcoal. Whatever sets the mood for that specific moment and panel

In a few words, how would you describe the new book?

Think "Matrix" meets "Lord of the Rings" with a smack of a demon's hand.

■ TODD CASEY



TRISH

CREAM OF THE CROP

WIZARD rolls out the five must-see anime of 2004

RAVE ON Haru faces off against the evil Demon Card organization in "Rave Master."

For anime fans, there'll be more to the new year than drunken revelry. With every year, hundreds of new properties hit the U.S., and 2004 is no different. The year's lineup looks to please hardcore and newbie fans alike with a mix of action, drama and comedy. Looking for the right time to jump into the anime scene? Well, we're making it real easy for you and putting together the five most anticipated anime properties coming your way in 2004.

KIDDY GRADE

One of the newest television series from famed studio Gonzo ("Hellsing"), "Kiddy Grade" is set to make a big splash from FUNimation on DVD. The story follows two agents of GOTT, an organization that keeps peace throughout the galaxy. Special agents Éclair and Lumiere, each armed with an amazing array of special abilities, bring down the bad guys and crusade for justice across the stars. Gen Fukunaga, president of FUNimation, is upbeat about the show's chances for success. "With its unique story, great sci-fi action, engaging characters and digital animation, we expect 'Kiddy Grade' to be a tremendous success in the United States."

D.N.ANGEL

Based on the incredibly hot manga series, "D.N.Angel" follows the dual life of Daisuke, who at first glance seems like your average high school student. Beneath the surface, he harbors a secret life beyond imagination. He's also the reincarnation of the legendary angelic thief Dark, known for stealing both priceless artifacts and the hearts of the women he encounters (including Daisuke's high school crush!). A divine combination of humor, romance and action, "D.N.Angel" has a legion of fans both in Japan and the U.S., and is set to arrive from ADV Films in 2004.

STEAMBOY

From Akira creator Katsuhiro Otomo comes "Steamboy," the long-delayed, multi-million dollar anime project that's set for a 2004 theatrical release from DreamWorks. Delayed for over eight years, fans of Otomo have been chomping at the bit to see his latest masterpiece, and their chance has finally arrived. The story follows the adventures of a young inventor in a steampunk society, who quickly discovers the horrifying power locked within a "Steam Ball" he received from his grandfather. The animation is said to be unlike anything we've ever seen; the budget, a record-breaking $20 million, is the most ever spent on an animated feature in Japan!

RAVE MASTER

Dark Stone, the master of the Dark Side, has risen again after a decades of slumber. His evil can only be resisted with the power of the Rave Stone, which can only be controlled by the Rave Master, an unassuming adventurer named Shiba. The nefarious organization Demon Card, corrupted by Dark Stone, hunts Shiba down, and in a climactic battle, control of the Rave Stone is gifted to Shiba's young ward, Haru! Due on Cartoon Network in 2004, Rave Master is sure to please fans of all ages. "This property has everything from epic storylines and comic relief to quest-driven adventure and the coolest cast of characters you'll ever meet" says Maury McIntyre, director of brand development for TOKYOPOP.

GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX

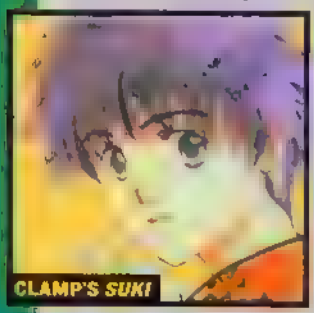
The hottest property of 2004 is, far and away, "Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex." This 52-episode series follows the original adventures of cybernetic supercop Makoto Kusanagi as she takes out the criminal element in futuristic Japan with more moves than a Bruce Lee movie. Animated by production IG, with music by renowned composer Yoko Kanno, "Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex" is an anime fan's dream come true.

■ ZAC BERTSCHY

STEAM DREAM Katsuhiro Otomo's "Steamboy" may be headed to a theater near you.

ANIME BUZZBOX

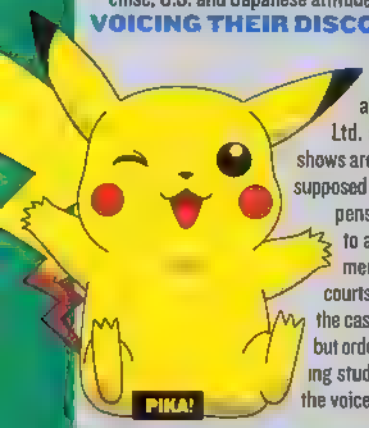
TOKYOPOP CLAMPS DOWN TOKYOPOP is arguably the largest American distributor of anime and manga today, whereas CLAMP are the most popular manga creators in Japan. It makes sense then that TOKYOPOP just announced five new CLAMP titles in its lineup for 2004. With titles like *RG Veda* (CLAMP's first professional work), *Suki* (a romance-drama) *Legal Drug* (action and mysterious powers), *The One I Love* (a 12-story romance anthology) and *The Legend of Chun Hyang* (a Korean historical fantasy), it looks like the coming months for otaku everywhere will be spent reading!


CLAMP'S *SUKI*

CHINESE ANIME? Making its American premier at the Las Vegas Comic Con, "Chinamation" is a new wave of animation that was previously hidden from view for decades due to political and economic reasons. With an art style that sets it apart from Japanese anime, Chinamation is currently undergoing a renaissance as it spreads worldwide.

PIKACHU-U A volume of academic articles about the Pokemon franchise and phenomenon will hit stands in February from Duke University Press. Entitled *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, and edited by Dr. Joseph Tobin, the various essays will cover topics such as different elements of the franchise, U.S. and Japanese attitudes and more.

VOICING THEIR DISCONTENT Roughly 360 voice actors were awarded $796,000 in compensation for unpaid royalties after suing Nippon Animation Ltd. and Onkyo Eizo System. When shows are released on video, royalties are supposed to be paid to voice actors in compensation for their work, according to a Japanese Actors Union agreement. However, after being in the courts for four years, a judge dismissed the case against Nippon Animation Ltd., but ordered Onkyo Eizo System, a recording studio subsidiary of Nippon, to pay the voice actors compensation.


PIKA!

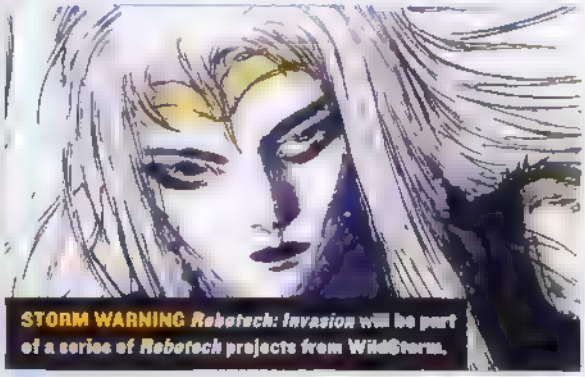
ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTH

GUNDAM MAKES ITS RETURN

Yoshiyuki Tomino's original three Gundam novels, *Awakening, Escalation* and *Confrontation*, are about to be collected and released in a single volume from Stone Bridge Press. Originally published in 1979 by Asahi Sonorama, and in English by Del Rey in 1990, the series takes a deeper look at the conflict between Amuro Ray and Char Anzanable. The book, entitled *Mobile Suit Gundam: Awakening, Escalation, Confrontation*, will be released in April for $14.95

HI TECH

Anime legend tackles 'Robotech' covers


STORM WARNING *Robotech: Invasion* will be part of a series of *Robotech* projects from WildStorm.

A storm is brewing for Robotech... WildStorm that is. A mysterious alien race known as the Invid now controls the Earth, and humanity is reeling from the devastating invasion...but not for long. The war to reclaim Earth begins in January with the launch of *Robotech: Invasion*.

The five-issue WildStorm mini-series follows the young pilot Lance Belmont, a.k.a. Lancer. "[Lance] finds himself cast away in an unfamiliar land after an ill-fated attempt to liberate the Earth," Harmony Gold Creative Director Tommy Yune explained. Tune is supervising the WildStorm project for Harmony Gold, which owns the Robotech franchise.

Robotech fans should get a kick out of seeing Lancer in full uniform and piloting a mecha, making its first comic appearance in the series.

Invasion will also contain a backup story that takes place on Earth's first Mars colony before the events of the famed "Macross Saga" and feature a number of familiar faces from the Robotech universe.

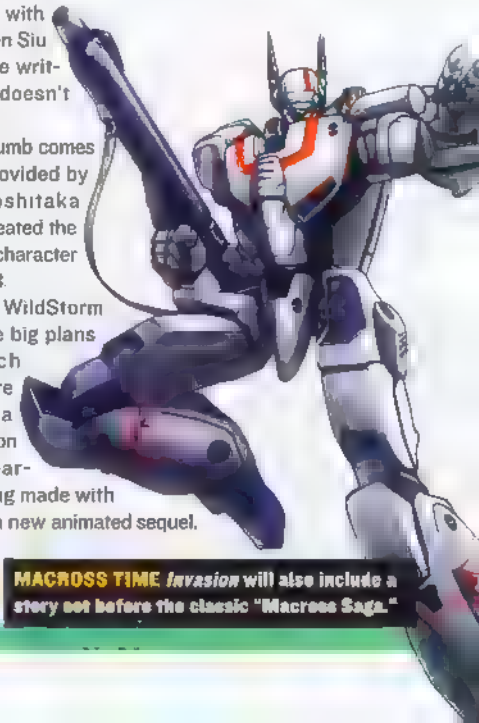
"Though this subplot occurs over three decades earlier," Yune explained. "The story cleverly weaves together elements of the two critical periods from 'Robotech.'"

The artwork for the new series comes from Takeshi Miyazawa and UDON Studios with Jay Faerber and Ken Siu Chong handling the writing chores. But it doesn't stop there.

The sweetest plumb comes from the covers provided by anime veteran Yoshitaka Amano, who also created the original "Robotech" character designs back in 1983.

After *Invasion*, WildStorm hopes to announce big plans for the Robotech license with future mini-series and a rumored crossover on the horizon. Preparations are also being made with Harmony Gold for a new animated sequel.

■ JESSE M.X. GANGL


MACROSS TIME *Invasion* will also include a story set before the classic "Macross Saga."

ANIME 101

FULL METAL PANIC!

Sick and tired of your average, run-of-the-mill giant robot series? Your prayers have been answered. ADV's hottest new mecha action series, "Full Metal Panic!" is burning up the sales charts and exciting anime fans across the country. The story follows a secret anti-terror organization known as Mithril, that sends tough-as-nails special agent Sosuke Sagara to high school, posing undercover as a student. His mission? Keep an eye on Kaname Chidori, a popular high school girl who's rumored to have the power of "The Whispered," a highly sought-after ability that's the target of terrorist organizations the world over. It's a maelstrom of comedy and action as the rigid Sosuke tries to adapt to high school life, while Kaname deals with the realization that she's more than meets the eye. The first DVD is available with a limited edition collector's box set from ADV Films now. This is one series no serious anime fan should be without! ■ XB

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TOKYOPOP PREPS ITS 'BATTLE' PLAN

Ultra-violent 'Battle Vixens' reaches U.S.

Struggling to get your fix of insane violence and busty manga ladies? Look no further than *Battle Vixens*.

Set to debut in May, TOKYOPOP's latest addition to its manga stable will be adapted by veteran comic scribe Keith Giffen (*Formerly Known as the Justice League*), who also handled the English adaptation of *Battle Royale*.

The manga tells the story of a confused teenage girl who's inherited a jewel endowing her with the spirit of an ancient Chinese warrior. The girl discovers she's not the only gifted child when her mother ships her off to train with other "Toushi" warriors. But there's more to the gathering of fighters than training, says *Battle Vixens* Editor Rob Tokar.

"We've all seen countless stories featuring characters who inherit some special item, device, or element that gives them great power," Tokar noted. "But, in *Battle Vixens*, the element that gives them power also dramatically affects the personalities of the recipients. They're not just able to fight—they're filled with an insane lust to fight."

What can you expect when the spirits of the gems are the warriors from the acclaimed *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* series? And you thought your teenage years were tough.

While *Vixens* will be heavy on the bloodshed, there'll also be a bevy of scantily-clad babes getting their slash on, making the title definitely for the mature crowd, despite its cartoony art and offbeat humor, Tokar says.

"The copious amount of 'fan service' shots and girls' blouses that literally explode open would earn this book an 'Older Teen' rating," Tokar explained. "I won't be surprised if it appeals to a male audience, especially with a female protagonist who's as ditzy as she is busty." ■ JG

BLOODLUST The stars of TOKYOPOP's *Battle Vixens* have an insane craving for violent combat—and bondage!

HOTIMPORTS

MANGA:

BATTLE ROYALE VOL. 5 (TOKYOPOP) Shinji Mimura has successfully hacked into the government computer that manages the Program, but a major setback occurs when he discovers that their collars have been bugged, and they've known all along! Determined, Shinji devises a plan involving the explosives his late uncle left him. $9.99

RECORD OF LODOSS WAR: THE LADY OF PHARIS COLLECTOR'S EDITION BOOK 2 (CPM Manga) The forces of Light and Dark have amassed, ready to do battle and decide the future of Lodoss! Only a motley crew of warriors—including a dwarf, a knight and an elf—stands between the evil succubus, and the destruction of the entire world! $15.95

ANIME:

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION: DIRECTOR'S CUT RESURRECTION (ADV Films) Apparently, "Evangelion" is the gift that just keeps on giving! Compiling the director's cut and original versions of episodes 21-23 in English and Japanese, this special release will also include an exclusive 25-minute interview with the folks at Weta Workshop, the Academy Award-winning special effects studio currently working on the live-action "Neon Genesis Evangelion" film! $29.98

THE BIG O II VOL.1 (Bandai Entertainment) When last we saw him, Roger Smith was defending Paradigm City against three invading robots. Now that the battle's over, however, Roger's questioning everything he's believed about himself, and the world he lives in. New mysteries arise and old enemies strike as Roger Smith and the Big O uncover more clues about the cataclysmic event that happened 40 years ago! $24.98

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BIRDS OF PREY

Girl power soars as a new creative team kicks the high-flying adventures of Black Canary, Huntress and Oracle into overdrive

WRITER: GAIL SIMONE
ARTISTS: ED BENES & ALEX LEI
PUBLISHER: DC COMICS

Sexy, funny, fierce—who knew giving DC's *Birds of Prey* a stunning makeover would be as easy as adding three simple ingredients?

Gotham's tantalizing trio of femme fatales are kicking more butt then ever before, courtesy of a spunky new direction by writer Gail Simone and artist Ed Benes. The first thing the duo did when they took the Birds under their wing in issue #56?

"The goal was to make them dangerous," reveals the popular scribe. "If Black Canary has to put you down, it's not going to be like Superman's gentle flick of the pinky—she's going to break your arm. If you give Huntress trouble, there's a definite possibility you'll get a crossbow bolt in your leg and a boot in your face. And Oracle has the potential to be one of the scariest characters in the DCU—a woman who can uncover secrets halfway around the world and change the political course of nations with an hour's worth of typing."

Under Simone's watch, the long-standing partnership between Dinah Lance (a.k.a. Black Canary) and Barbara Gordon (a.k.a. Oracle) has taken advantage of that power by being more proactive and taking fights to the enemy. In the four-part "Of Like Minds" storyarc, Oracle sends Black Canary to scare some justice into a crooked CEO on the verge of pulling an Enron-like embezzlement scam. But in the first of many twists, the Birds discover they're hunting for the wrong prey, as Dinah finds herself roped in by Savant—a whacked out, sadistic, smooth-talking extortionist who quickly proves himself worthy of joining the pantheon of Bat-rogues. Savant's so tough in fact that Oracle calls in Helena Bertinelli (a.k.a. The Huntress) for back up, and in the process of taking him down, the dynamic duo becomes a threesome.

"Helena just adds a great zest to the mix," explains Simone the moody vigilante's addition to the Birds. "Even in the JLA, she was sort of an outsider. But this might be the one place in the DC Universe where she feels like she fits in."

Having proven that she can bring the funny with her stint on Marvel's *Deadpool* and *Agent X*, Simone wastes no time infusing the book with her trademark knack for snappy lines and wry humor. From the conversation between Oracle and Dinah about shrimp ("If I had two bites of those every day, I'd never need another man!") to the Huntress complaining about the trampiness of Dinah's fishnets, the sidesplitting dialogue separates *Birds of Prey* from the doom and gloom of other Bat-titles.

"This is a book about old friends," points out Simone. "Friends tell jokes. They tease and poke at each other in times of stress. I like that all three have different senses of humor—Oracle is acerbic and dry, Canary is likely to say indelicate and rude things, and Huntress has a definite edge to her humor. It gives the book a unique vibe, and it's fun to see what awful thing they'll say each issue."

But make no mistake—Simone and Benes (*Supergirl*) can certainly dial up the fierce factor with high-octane action and jaw-cracking fight scenes, like the brutal slugfest between Black Canary

FLY GIRLS (From left) Huntress, Oracle and Black Canary are more dangerous under Simone's watch.

CHOKE HOLD Huntress was always a bit overzealous when applying the Heimlich Maneuver.

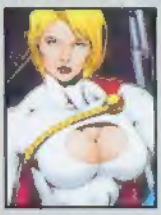
and Savant that ends with Dinah's hobbling and capture in issue #56, or Huntress going punch for punch with Savant's muscle-bound brute of a henchman to save Dinah in issue #59. "I *love* writing and choreographing the fight scenes!" gushes the scribe. "I know many writers leave this to the artists, but it's a joy for me. Fortunately, Ed takes my insane notions and really goes nuts. He's terrific at the adrenaline-packed moments."

Add to that the artist's ridiculously sexy renderings of the gals, and you've got the perfect blend of wisecracking, ass-kicking and drop-dead gorgeous. And the naughty "spread-legged" pose of Dinah in the car in issue #56 proves that Benes ain't afraid to flash the Birds' most eye-popping assets! "Ed is justly famed for drawing some of the sexiest women in comics," laughs Simone. "But what I love even more is that he's really terrific at telling the story through facial expressions and body language. Plus, his rendition of the Huntress can give Jim Lee's Huntress serious competition!"

And there's plenty more action to come. January's issue #63 advances the new "Sensei and Student" arc, which finds Oracle and Huntress making new enemies back home while Black Canary continues her martial arts antics with Lady Shiva in China. Meanwhile, Simone hopes that the fabulous response received by the book so far will carry over into the new year. Says the scribe, "With any luck, we'll continue to hit that niche market: Readers who like sexy, kickass, funny, intelligent women who hit people!" ■ **RICHARD HO**

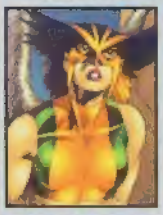
THREE'S COMPANY

With the career loner Huntress joining the *Birds of Prey* team, we got to thinking about some other kick-ass female heroes in the DCU that might not mind taking orders from a gal in a wheelchair. Here's the "most wanted" list we came up with!



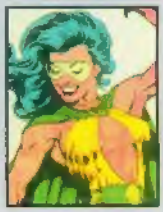
POWER GIRL The Atlantean lass certainly knew how to pack a punch as Oracle's muscle in the original Birds of Prey. Sure, her final mission resulted in a bunch of deaths—but with another JSA stint under her belt, we think Kara's ready to rejoin her former partners!

NIGHTSHADE Here's one gal who gives new meaning to the term "shadow boxing." With her "living shadow" skills and ability to phase back and forth between our reality and the Nightshade dimension, this former Charlton hero would bring some much needed covert skill to the Birds' operation.



HAWKGIRL Thanks to her Nth metal wings, Kendra Saunders would be the first Bird who was actually, you know, a bird. Plus, she can bash lowly street criminals in the head while soaring through the Gotham night with her Thanagarian mace. Stealth? What's that?

PHANTOM LADY Turning invisible ain't the only power in Phantom Lady's arsenal. With a costume skimpy enough to make a Playboy Playmate blush, this saucy crimefighter has the power to stop even the toughest criminal in his tracks. Just don't stare too long at her guns, ya hear?



ZATANNA (left) Okay, so the Birds of Prey job description usually calls for down-and-dirty butt-kickers. But honestly, when you can send a supervillain running for the crapper just by saying "AEHRRAID," who's gonna turn you down?

RED TORNADO Not the robotic wind warrior and defender of ecology. We're talking about the Golden Age Red Tornado, Abigail "Ma" Hunkel! You know, the homemaker who slapped a saucepan on her head and tried to join the JSA? That little accessory just might come in handy for the Birds' fondue night! ■ **RH**

12 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT MARC SILVESTRI

1. MARC SILVESTRI...SITCOM STAR? In 1993, Silvestri guest-starred on Bob Newhart's "Bob" sitcom, which featured Newhart as an aging comic book artist facing a new generation of creators at an award ceremony. Among the other comic stars appearing in the episode were Sergio Aragonés, Bob Kane, Jack Kirby and Jim Lee.

2. THE TALLEST MAN IN COMICS, Silvestri looms large at 6 feet 6 inches.

3. MARC SILVESTRI KNOWS HOW TO CRACK SKULLS. The *New X-Men* penciler made his way as a bouncer before breaking into the world of comics. While still underage, Silvestri worked the door at a seedy Chicago jazz club. Because the club closed later than most venues, Silvestri found himself roughing up the dregs of the evening as they tried to skip out on their checks, or grope the waitresses.

4. LIES AND SUBTERFUGE were used by Silvestri to break into comics. After standing in line for hours at a convention to get his work reviewed by DC Editor Joe Orlando, the line was cut before Silvestri's turn. Frustrated, Silvestri and brother Eric discovered Orlando's hotel room and pretended to be room service. Before Orlando could slam the door, Silvestri whipped out his portfolio, and after a brief conversation, landed a job at DC Comics.

5. I WANT YOUR SEX? Before there was *Aphrodite IX*, there was *Sexbot*. While brainstorming ideas for a new book, then-Top Cow penciler David Finch was looking to work on a sci-fi project that featured a really hot chick with a big gun. Editor Renae Geerling dubbed the project *Sexbot*, but Silvestri quickly put the kibosh on the naughty moniker, musing, "What the hell have we become?"

6. VIVA LAS VEGAS! Late one evening, while at a party in Las Vegas, Silvestri turned to his then-girlfriend Bridget and said "Hey, wanna get married?" The newly engaged couple rushed to find a limo and marriage license and were married at the Little White Wedding Chapel in the wee hours of the morning.

7. TOO MUCH ALCOHOL played a part in naming Silvestri's Image studio. According to the Top Cow founder, after a group of staffers split a bottle of wine the name Top Cow stuck in their minds. After sobering up, the Cow crew began to rethink the name, until a staffer put together a humorous logo for it, which has endured to this day.

8. COMICS WEREN'T ON THE RADAR for Silvestri early on. If he hadn't entered the industry, Silvestri would have pursued a career as a film director. Silvestri didn't even start drawing comics until about six months before getting his first paying gig. While visiting family, Silvestri's comic book-collecting cousin showed the future artist a DC talent search ad. Intrigued by the job, which Silvestri later admitted "sounded easy," he cobbled together a portfolio for the talent search.

9. CRAP IS UNAVOIDABLE, even for Marc Silvestri. The superstar artist admits that even he has his share of bad ideas, some of which he has trouble parting with. Among them is a pitch for a "Charlie's Angels" meets "The Craft" series. Despite his fondness for the concept, the busty magicians idea got a lukewarm response and remains in the vault.

10. TOP COW HAS OVER 300 CHARACTERS in the studio's library from various books and storylines over the years. After over a decade in the business, many characters have been created, only to be set aside for later use.

11. IT WASN'T THE X-MEN that kicked off Silvestri's artistic career. The former *Uncanny X-Men* artist's first work was on DC's *Weird War Tales*, which never saw print. His first published work was *House of Mystery* #292, in May 1981. Silvestri then moved over to Marvel Comics, starting with *Conan the King* #13 in 1982.

12. HIGHER LEARNING is common practice at the Cow. The studio tries to foster an educational environment for their young artists. Silvestri sees Top Cow as a school that pays its students to learn, with new recruits benefiting from being surrounded by more veteran talent in closed quarters. Sorry, no recess. ■ HEIDI WARD

WITCHY WOMAN Silvestri's favorite work of his own is *Cyblade/Shi*, the first appearance of Witchblade.

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